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EDITORIAL

Renewed Commitments

In Memoriam: Bisi Silva and Okwui Enwezor

We, Talia Lieber and Rebecca Wolff, are excited to publish our first issue of *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* as the journal's new co-Editors-in-Chief. We decided to take up this position after serving as both editors and arts editors to deepen our commitment to providing a platform for the scholarship and creative practices emanating from the African continent. As Africanist art historians, this commitment to supporting Africa-based scholars and creative practitioners has been greatly influenced by Bisi Silva and Okwui Enwezor. We thus dedicate our first issue to these two luminaries. Both Silva and Enwezor dedicated their lives to generating knowledge about contemporary African art through curatorial and scholarly initiatives; Silva through her directorship of the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Lagos, and her dedication to curatorial mentorship, and Enwezor through his groundbreaking exhibitions and scholarship that centered African modern and contemporary practices within a global art historical context. Their untimely deaths in 2019 and their recent absence from the contemporary art world have been palpably felt in the scholarly and artistic communities of their native Nigeria, across the African continent and, indeed, across the globe. Yet, their continued presence is palpably felt as well. This past fall, the organizers of the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London's FORUM compiled and published stories from participating artists, writers, and curators who shared what they learned from Silva, creating an online toolkit of Silva's advice so that her lessons remain accessible. Similarly, as this issue goes to print, the international Sharjah Biennial has just announced that it will host Enwezor's final exhibition *Postcolonial* in 2021. To celebrate Enwezor's and Silva's reverberating legacies, this issue reflects the breadth of scholarship produced by Nigerian academics and the practices of artists that reflect the exciting dynamism of contemporary African art and literature, which Silva and Enwezor championed.

Perhaps nobody has made more of an impact in introducing modern and contemporary African art to a global audience than Okwui Enwezor. Through his dedication to this field, he helped expand the purview of the global contemporary art world and African art scholarship. His commitment to promoting the visibility of African artistic practices has served as an inspiration for us to support scholarship based on the continent. Enwezor's groundbreaking 2001 exhibition *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945–1994*, which traveled to Munich, Berlin, Chicago, and New York, promoted a conception of modernism with African art at its nucleus, centering its role in decolonial and nationalist projects. Bringing together visual art, textiles, photography, architecture, music, theater, and film, *The Short Century* still serves as the benchmark study of comparative African modernisms. Enwezor himself broke many barriers in the often Euro-centric global contemporary art world, becoming the first non-European curator of the important German quinquennial Documenta in 2002, and the first African curator of the Venice Biennale in 2015. *Documenta 11*, under his leadership, was hailed as the first truly post-colonial and global Documenta in its history. Decentering Documenta's European context, he extended its sites to include exhibitions in New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos. In 2011, he was appointed the Director of Haus der Kunst in Munich, a position he held until 2018. His initiatives diversified the museum's programming, such as the exhibition *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965*, which attempted to present a truly global survey of mid-century modern art. In addition to his curatorial work, Enwezor launched *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art*. At a time when contemporary African art held a tenuous place in art history, *Nka* served as a fundamental forum for knowledge generation about this emerging field. The articles in *Nka* helped shape an emerging generation of Africanist art scholars, including the two of us. Moreover, his co-written book with Chika Okeke-Agulu *Contemporary Art Since 1980* (2009) served as an early introduction to contemporary African artists about which we now write extensively.

Rebecca briefly met Enwezor while working in a research capacity at a contemporary art gallery in New York, which represents artist Melvin Edwards. Enwezor met with Edwards to select works for the Venice Biennale, and Enwezor, through focused

discussion with the artist, carefully decided on an array of artworks that spoke to each other both formally and thematically, and represented an important moment in Edwards' practice. Having admired and written about Enwezor's curatorial practice for several years, observing how he envisioned an artist's work within the wider context of a large thematic exhibition was a critical moment in her career. Enwezor's curatorial incisiveness and congeniality have stayed with her through the years.

This issue also recognizes another vibrant force in the field of African art and scholarship. Our mentor Bisi Silva, the Founding Director of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, curated a number of exhibitions and brought in artists and scholars from across the African continent to speak about their work. Through CCA programming, Silva promoted the work of women artists like Wura-Natasha Ogunji, Otobong Nkanga, Ndidi Dike, and Zanele Muholi. She left this world with many admirers. Young and emerging practitioners from the continent as well as more renowned artists entrusted Silva to examine, critique, and exhibit their work. Curators and scholars from across the globe looked to learn from and collaborate with Silva, for she set a path of her own visionary direction that others wished to follow. In addition to curating major exhibitions featuring the work of Nigerian photographer J.D. Okhai Ojeikere and multi-media artist El Anatsui, Silva organized the Second Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art in Greece and co-curated the seventh Dak'Art Biennale de l'Art Africain Contemporain in Senegal. Her curatorial projects within and outside Nigeria and her many publications, including her groundbreaking study of J. D. Okhai Ojeikere's photographs, not only highlighted work that experimented with new media, but also encouraged the use of archival materials to uncover histories and convey national and artistic narratives.

Talia met Silva in 2014 in Kigali during Silva's first-ever visit to Rwanda, where they organized a meeting with Rwandese artists. Silva encouraged artists experimenting with time-based media to apply to the 10th Bamako Encounters Biennale of African Photography in 2015, for which Silva was serving as Artistic Director. Silva was dedicated to giving a platform to artists from countries that had not been visible at the Biennale before. Several Rwandese artists applied to the Biennale that year, and one young photographer from Rwanda participated in its programming. Silva

fostered the relationships with artists established during her visit, keeping in touch through email and social media, encouraging them to participate in Àsikò Art School, an annual program from 2010 to 2016 that took place in different countries throughout the African continent. At Àsikò, artists and curators engaged in month-long seminars, workshops, exhibitions, and critiques to develop their work and careers. The edited volume *Àsikò: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa* incorporates the reflections of Àsikò participants through their essays, interviews, archival photographs and documents, and visual and literary work. The publication is tangible testament to how Silva changed the lives of individuals—specifically artists, curators, and scholars—with her probing questions, stirring critiques, or motivating praise.

Those of us who have had the great privilege of interacting with Silva are faced with the daunting desire that an ounce of her eloquence, acuteness, good humor, and capacity for achieving extraordinary goals transfers to our own intellectual and artistic endeavors. We not only dedicate this issue in memory of Silva's pedagogical and curatorial achievements, but devote its pages to renewing the journal's commitment to supporting the publication of critical scholarship and creative art from the African continent. Silva's many achievements motivate our own academic endeavors and guide our collaborations with contemporary artists from Africa. We are fortunate to have experienced her mentorship and will miss her brilliance. In what turned out to be our final correspondence with Silva in the Fall of 2018, she wrote that she would send out the Call for Papers for this very issue of the journal, and wished us congratulations for joining *Ufahamu's* leadership.

In memory of Okwui Enwezor and Bisi Silva and their devotion to the development of critical artwork, exhibitions, and scholarship, this issue includes scholarly essays, art, and poetry that question, examine, and analyse diverse histories and systems of power. The majority of the contributors included in this issue, like Enwezor and Silva, were born in Nigeria. Their words and images present varied looks into complexities seen and unseen in Nigeria and its diasporas that are shaped by vestiges of the past.

Part One of this issue includes a collection of six essays. Bright Alozie's examination of segregated residential spaces in Nigeria emphasizes the emergence of alterity from visualizations

of racial divisions in place under colonial rule and suggests the ramifications of past policies and topographies in postcolonial Nigerian cities. Emem Michael Udo considers the diffusion of Yoruba culture as a result of the enslavement of African peoples in the Western hemisphere, specifically in the way Yoruba religion formed the foundation for the religions of Candomble, Santería, and Vodoun. Clement Olujide Ajidahun utilizes a feminist lens to analyze Ngozi Omeje's *The Conquered Maiden* and Amma Darko's *Faceless* and compare the writers' attitudes toward the characters of the girl-child in their play and novel respectively. Concluding the critical essays in Part One is Temitope Fagunwa's Marxist study of the intertwined relationship between colonialism, sexism, and capitalism, and how it led to the oppression faced by Nigerian women. By scrutinizing histories and practices produced by imperial economies and policies, the essays in this issue help formulate an understanding of the evolution of Nigerian society and its diasporas.

Our cover image, the painting *Exodus* by Chike Azuonye, draws from the artist's own childhood experience as a Biafran refugee during the civil war in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970. While the painting remains rooted in the memory of Biafra, the intentional anonymity of the figures extends its representation to the recent refugee crisis in Europe, where the artist now lives. Like Silva and Enwezor, Azuonye himself works to promote contemporary Nigerian art abroad through his activities in the Nigerian Artist Society UK, which regularly stages exhibitions of contemporary Nigerian art. Azuonye created *Exodus* for the 2018 exhibition "Legacies of Biafra," the first to critically reexamine the effects of the war and its lasting impact on Nigerian society. Azuonye's own explanation of *Exodus* and its full image are featured in Part Two of this issue.

Part Two also features the artwork of Rita Doris Edumchieke Ubah and Girma Bulti, and the poems of Clement Olujide Ajidahun. Rita Doris Edumchieke Ubah's large-scale and multi-media textile work *Ije Agwo (Snake)* references the artist's Igbo culture through the evocation of *uli*, a form of body and wall painting practiced by women. The predominant spiral shape in the artwork reflects the *uli* design element of the *agwologwo* (which often symbolizes the snake) and evokes the cycle of life as represented by a snake's undulating movement. Girma Bulti's acrylic painting *My Dream* represents the importance of community

when faced with the hardships of daily life. Bulti incorporates eye-catching geometric patterns that reference Ethiopia's cultural heritage into his figures and their surrounding environment. In his thought-provoking poem, *Condolence Register*, Ajidahun explores the hidden dimensions of character. In *The Tryst*, Ajidahun presents a cutting yet rousing portrait of political power.

The issue concludes with book reviews by graduate students, all of whom have ties to the *Ufahamu* editorial team in its past or present. Laura Cox evaluates Gavin Steingo's *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* and Rebecca Temkin examines Tamba M'Bayo's *Muslim Interpreters in Colonial Senegal, 1850-1920: Mediations of Knowledge and Power in the Lower and Middle Senegal River Valley*, both 2016 publications. Alexis Rae examines the 2018 publication by Mildred Mortimer entitled *Women Fight, Women Write: Texts on the Algerian War*. Together the reviews present informed analyses of recent scholarship, positioning the final pages of this issue as a space for continued questioning and intellectual interchange. We encourage our readers, many of whom are skilled writers and thinkers, to consider reviewing a book from the growing list of books—available on our journal's website or by email—to ensure that these types of scholarly dialogues carry on.

This issue, our first undertaking as Editors-in-Chief, includes articles, artworks, poems, and book reviews in memory of two vivacious forces who have shaped the role of scholarly criticism on the African continent and throughout the globe. Although we have been involved with efforts leading to *Ufahamu* publications for several years and have seen firsthand its stimulations and challenges, we remain energized by the amount of labor, collegiality, and knowledge-sharing that contributes to the journal's success. In this next year, the fiftieth anniversary of *Ufahamu*'s establishment, we hope our work sparks dialogue and debate, and promotes inclusivity of voices from the African continent that speaks to and honors the journal's origins of activism.

We are grateful to Janice Levi and Madina Thiam, the former Editors-in-Chief of *Ufahamu* who have shown us time and time again incredible kindness and generosity when guiding us through this transitional period. After helping to revive the journal in their first years of graduate school and successfully publishing three issues since the fall of 2017, they have continued to devote their

time and energy to sustaining the journal's commitment to publish the work of academics, writers, and artists from across the African continent. Their dedication has resulted in increased submissions from across scholarly disciplines and diverse regions of the globe. We are fortunate to have such a knowledgeable duo supporting our efforts and those of our editorial team and contributors. We wish both Janice and Madina the best of luck in this final stage of dissertation writing and look forward to celebrating all that they have and will accomplish in their scholarship.

Through this issue, we recognize the pioneering work of Silva and Enwezor and the impact they have made, while celebrating the wealth of knowledge production both through scholarship and the arts on the African continent, and particularly in Nigeria. We hope this issue gives you, too, a sense of renewed commitment to whatever your interests and interventions may be. We look forward to the forthcoming issues of *Ufahamu* and to continuing our work alongside a dedicated team of editors in tandem with insightful contributors.

Talia Lieber and Rebecca Wolff
Co-Editors-in-Chief

