



Sahara Notes

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Sculptures That Speak With God by Sheila Chukwulozie

A day in the life of Sheila Chukwulozie; Writer, Performer, Multi-Media Artist

How to protect your intellectual property as a creative industry agent



Sahara Notes is a bimonthly e-magazine by The Sahara Centre.

We are committed to advancing social progress in Nigeria through the creative sector.

Our mission is to build a better Nigerian society through the understanding and celebration of the various facets of Nigerian culture.

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"Work, no play" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing a "Krio mask" from Sierra Leone, carved by woodworker Santigie

SCULPTURES THAT SPEAK WITH GOD

Written by Sheila Chukwulozie
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Sheila Chukwulozie is a Nigerian dancer, choreographer and artist who has lived on the African continent with traditional mask makers, Learn and create. She imagined herself as the peasant who unknowingly discovered the Sanxingdui ruins, to inquire about the artifacts unearthed in Sanxingdui, the African inhabitants, their rituals, our faces—imagining the resonance of floating through.



"Top Heavy" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing "Fula Mask" from Sierra Leone, carved by woodworker Santigie

Imagine waking up as a farmer in the Southwest of China. You're probably still in bed because you're dealing with the existential thoughts of today unfolding just as yesterday did. Time unfurls in your mind like a map you've already travelled, and so you shake your head because you know you will have to chase the aggressive chickens who come across your land in gangs more than flocks. You think of how to finally confront the sneaky children that steal a few low hanging fruits when you're not looking. Or maybe that's not it. Maybe you're awake so early because you have been warned that a drought might threaten your farm and you feel called to lead the community out of this natural disaster. You believe you can dig your way into a new source of water so you shake the sleep from your eye. You snap out of it and step into a world made small by routine. And it is in this world that you find yourself digging and digging and digging until you reach a bright piece of green stone that doesn't make itself clear at first. For one, Time has covered it in such a mix of elements that it no longer really looks like itself. Secondly, this is not what you want—you want water, not stone.



"Buffalo Girl" - mask from Sierra Leone, carved by woodworker Santigie

Now, this farmer might be neither you nor I, neither here nor now. But in 1929, the world had a farmer turning on a gravitational axis that pulled him far down into what is now known as the Sanxingdui Ruins. That single Jade piece that he found is dated anywhere between 2,600 years to 4800 years. And it is that single jade piece that has become the monumental bridge between a land once known to hold the daily lives of common farmers, and land that today, holds its historic place as the womb for a constellation of precious Bronze, Jade and Ivory artefacts confirmed to be relics of the Shang dynasty. Each artefact born along the Yellow River contains the energy of intangible values and tangible resources that show us why the Shang dynasty can afford to take its place as one of the most monumental epochs in the evolution of Chinese Civilization. Monumental in terms of travel, education and even language. What are the odds that these relics of culture at their highest peak would be found by a person so ordinary, in a backyard even more ordinary? I find it quite funny when Time plays tricks on us by coughing up these kinds of ironies...showing that the hard line between the noble and the common is often an economic illusion built to explain scarcity and even justify death.

Speaking of death, the Sanxingdui pit has been theorized to be a burial site. In there lay all sorts of artefacts, ranging from animal heads to crockery and even currency. Bronze cowries that showed signs of trading across the Indian Ocean were excavated to show that if no man is an island, no nation is either. However, what has proven the most captivating to the world is the Sanxingdui mask popular for its unique expression of a face: The frame of the eyes spreading up and outwards like they could be wings to carry the head, no matter how heavy. Ears, picking up from where the eyes end, opening up and dropping down as if the hearing will both lighten and deepen the burden of such a head. Large elevated eyes carved in relief, raised from an already three-dimensional face to become an even farther dimension. Sometimes, the iris of the eyes are given cork-like stems, antennas that communicate a knowledge that seems out of this world; so strong is this knowledge that it must transcend flatness. And sometimes, the eyes are shut, with a strong pulsating energy that makes you wonder if they are in fact closed or open. In this pose, stillness is expressed. However, when anything is expressed, it is easy to assume it is speaking, even if what is expressed in silence.



What is a face? What is a mask? And where do they differ?

In secondary school, I used to laugh with my hand covering my mouth. There were too many things I didn't want people to see then. One of them was a dark line on top of my upper lip. It wasn't there all the time, but it visited often. After staying away for so long, it visited me again in my last year of college. I was largely undisturbed, except for when it reminded me of how unfortunate my life felt when my primary goal as a teenage girl was to wear femininity with effortless grace. One day, when I'm visiting home after the semester is over, my sister watches me putting on makeup and asks me what is sitting on top of my lip. It's a question that I refused to indulge. With a cold stare into my mirror that tells her I'm imagining her face inside it, I spit words back at her; "What is what?" It seemed like I was blowing things but of proportion but her question reminded me of those questions where my answer didn't matter; whether I knew what it was or not, she was still going to offer me a way to escape walking around with a moustache looking line sitting on top of my lip. She tells me she understands I'm a feminist but "If you want, you can use concealer to cover it up"

What is in a face that makes us hold on to it for our dear lives, peering into our reversed faces in the mirror, hoping to find something that tells us a little bit more about ourselves? Forgetting that no matter how long we stand there, we will never really get to see ourselves as others see us for even the mirror is a reversal and the screen does not have the same depth perception as our eyes. The lens of a mobile phone camera is usually 35mm while that of our eyes is more like 50mm. We don't consider all the ways we approximate our faces and the face of others. What is it in a face that makes you swipe right now and swipe left later? Or is it just a face? Is it just the two eyes, the one nose and the one mouth that either makes your heart sing or makes your eyes roll?

Two years ago, for the purpose of an old ever unfinished essay, I posted a picture of myself on a website called 'photofeeler' where you can get any picture rated and reviewed by a bunch of strangers. According to their website, they "test photos not people." On the app, they have three categories: One for those looking to post their pictures on job websites (e.g LinkedIn); one for social pages (e.g Facebook); and one for romantic dating sites (e.g tinder). I posted the same picture of myself on both the business and the romantic website. I guess I was looking for both money and love at the same time. For the business section, each picture was rated on a scale of 1-5 for Competency, Likability, and Influentiality. Meanwhile, the scale for the dating section was based on Smartness, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. "Why would you do that to yourself?" my friend gasped over the phone. I couldn't see her face, but the horror in the gasp was crisp and clear. "For the work," I said without missing a beat. For the work.



"I became interested in masks when I noticed that a good mask is not a fake face but another face. What makes us so obsessed with a face that we cling to it? What makes us stare at that flipped face in the mirror, hoping to find some clues that tell us more about ourselves?"

"Two Heads Are Stronger" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing a sheikh mask from Sierra Leone, carved by woodworker Santigie

In the words of Chris Abani, "the face is a performance, an enactment by the animating consciousness behind it. When used with intent, it is the performance of awareness, behind it. So, in this way, the face is both the portal and that which is transported." I became invested in masks when I noticed that a good mask is not a false face, but instead another face. I remember going into my costume department as a theatre student trying to pick out some costumes for a new show. As I approached the wig section, she warned me from across the room "oh you have to be careful with the one you pick because wigs are never fun, they itch and they get you hot for no reason," she said. My friend and I looked at ourselves and laughed because at that very moment, I myself was wearing one of my many wigs. Sometimes a mask can be worn with so much sincerity I that it is hard for people to reconcile that it is a mask and yet, it is true. And that truth can sometimes be the story that justifies a person's life as one worth living. It's why one of my favourite moments from the Netflix series, Ginny & Georgia is when the mother (Georgia) teaches her daughter (Ginny) that makeup is a weapon; "If they can see where your makeup ends and your face begins, you've done it wrong," Georgia warns Ginny; "It's a face, not a mask, you have to blend." However, I wish I'd have let Georgia know, that mask and face do not always aim to negate each other. In fact, they need each other.

MASKS AND FACES: TWO SIDES, ONE COIN

Through the last time she saw her father's face, artist Sheila Chukwulozie takes us through traditional Benin and Nigerian mask festivals, how such rituals travel through life and death, awe and fear, and thus achieve the realm of concealing or revealing the truth of human beings.

When my father died, one of the ways I distracted myself from the unbearable density of my grief was by listening to people speak about theirs. A lot of them spoke about the fear of forgetting the face of the person they loved who was now lost. I wasn't so sure I shared that concern. I had always known my father's face not just as the skin around his skull, but really as a closet of emotions, filled with many colours of anger and concern. I knew his face to be his values. And I understood that I wasn't wrong on the day his body first arrived as a non-breathing one in an open casket. When I saw his face made up with brown foundation and eternal sleep, I still saw that anger and concern building a world for itself within the lines on his forehead. "There are some things that even death cannot take away," my mind whispered to my body.

Masks come into our life not just as an extension of our humanity, but almost as a U-haul that overturns what we think we know of ourselves, or what we think we need to do away with in ourselves. They are a means by which we get to forgive ourselves for not being able to wear the wholeness of our humanity on our face or at least, on our sleeve. We acknowledge what is always within us and yet, impossible to live out. They ask us to see the Behind-the-Scenes of ourselves and to see what makes the bed upon which we come to lay the surface of our souls- the surface we can bear to show on our Instagram or to our childhood friends at a ten-year reunion. They can be considered a figure of speech to hold the sentiment that there are some things that death cannot take away no matter how hard we wish. A reminder that if reality were a face, there is a thriving non-reality that weaves an existence from what we might call gibberish or nonsense; things we cannot translate well enough to take as seriously as we can or should.

Masks, like God, work in mysterious ways

On the same day that I saw my father's dead face for the first time, I also watched a masquerade walk into our compound with the vitality of men I had seen in bars and hotspots—ready to drink and drink because as we say "this life na wan." As I watched the masquerade jump and spin like my one-year-old niece who has no respect for gravity, I remembered that in Igbo cosmology, we were always dead.



"On a solid foundation" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing a "Krio mask" from Sierra Leone sculpted by woodworker Santigie

We were always dead
We just stopped by to see what all the fuss was about,
Came to buy some things from the market,
Or maybe we were bored.

And when our money runs out,
Or we grow tired of standing by the stalls,
Or we feel homesick,
We call it a day.

And we make it back home where
The Gods are our peers—
Gravity in playful reverse.

(Poem, "We Were Always Dead", by Sheila Chukwulozie)



Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu poses his latest sculpture "The Drummer" for the Park Lane exhibition, London, UK, September 7, 1971

Once upon a good time, in a conversation with the gifted Malian artist, Aboubakar Fofana, we spoke about museums and masquerades. He sat up from one of his stylish wooden seats and said to me "A museum of masks is a cemetery." His sitting position matched his ideological one: strong and sure. He went on to explain how masks that do not breathe on ceremonial grounds are inactive, and therefore dead. Of all the lessons they have to teach, very little is learned from outside a fragile glass box that says "DO NOT TOUCH." To this day, I understand him. His point is buttressed in a documentary called "Fang" in which a Cameroonian figure gets repeatedly amputated by foreigners who carry the figure so far away from its source, that its reason for being is completely missed. I had a great professor show me this same documentary six times because like Fofana, he had migrated to a foreign land and in one way or the other, felt just like a masquerade being asked to fulfil roles he was not made to play. "Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence," writes Charles Taylor in his essay, *The Politics of Recognition*, "and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confirming or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves." In retrospect, I should have seen the lines of misrecognition that connect both the faces of Fofana and my professor. Two gifted older African artists with lives in Western countries, feeling obliged to accept masks they had not carved, knowing they carve finer things than most.

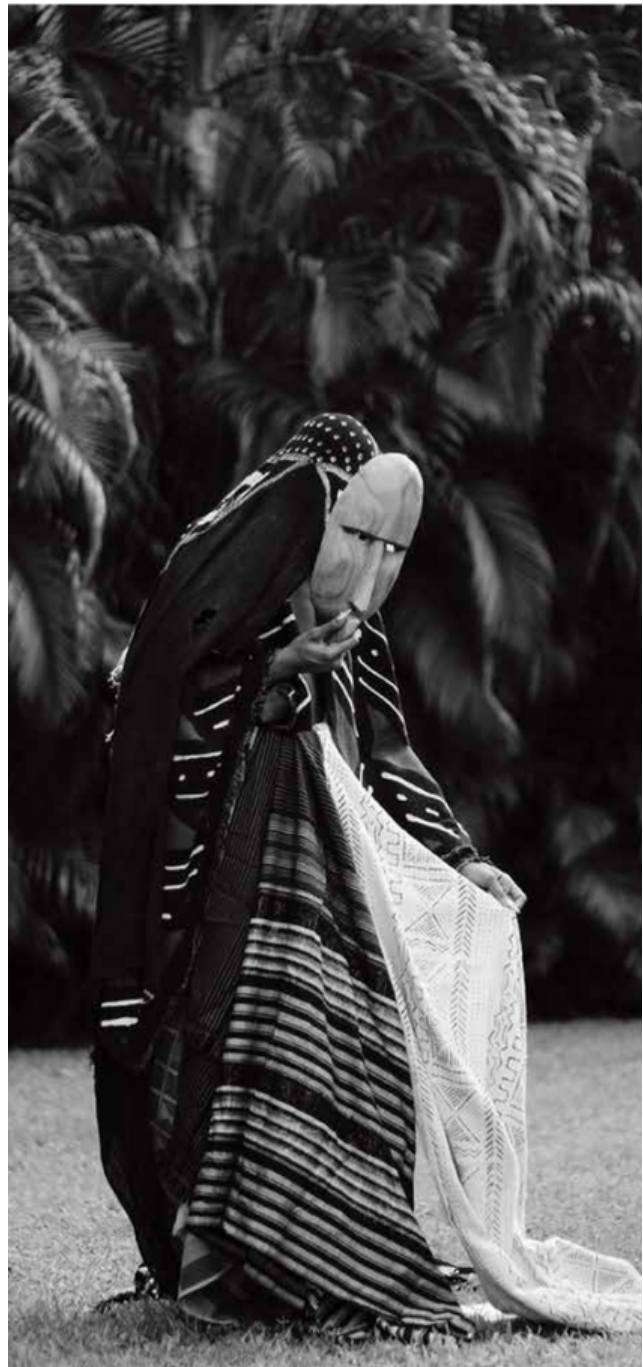
Masks, like God, work in mysterious ways. A healthy masquerade is neither assembled nor labelled by the biological classifications by which we come to call ourselves Human. The design is so different that where an optic nerve may connect the human eye to the human brain, the masquerade may need to kick his leg many meters high to see what is before him. In Igbo culture, some masquerades are more aquatic than land-based. Others have no physical body and must manifest only through their voice. It is often due to this mysticism that masks get misunderstood as machines of concealment as opposed to the concept of a face which is often taken to mean "true." According to Pico Iyer, "mysticism is almost the unchanging backbeat and backstage truth that stands behind all the changing surfaces and shifts in the world." I've never sensed mystery to be the thing that divides us by our own doing. Perhaps mysteries are often confused with lies. However, where lies are the fruit of complication, I believe mystery to be the fruit of complexity. In a lie, we know the whole story, and yet we claim that the whole story is something else. However, in a mystery, it is clear that we do not know the whole story, and yet, we are trying to grasp onto a fractal knowledge that reveals a tiny part to reflect the workings of the large whole.



My time with maskers in different parts of the world has shown me that the time spent transforming the material into form, is time spent considering if the desire for order is worth it at all. For a whole year, I travelled around West Africa on the wings of a generous grant to study as an apprentice to mask makers and cloth weavers. Each time I saw them stand before their material, be it clay or wood, facing the shapelessness of their presence while dreaming of the shape of their future, I must confess that I wondered if they would ever make it. It's just the same way I come before a blank page with a hopeful cursor, beating at the pace of my own self-doubt running around my head. The medium is only a weapon to the universal challenge of whether or not anyone deserves to say they are living a life worth being alive for.

Whenever I try to look through my screen and into the faces of the Sanxingdui masks, I find myself back in 2018, wandering through the festive streets of Benin Republic for their annual Voodoo ceremony. Growing up as an Igbo child meant that I was no foreigner in the realm of spirit creatures towering over the earth to remember what it felt like to be just as human as us. Every Christmas, when we would travel from the city to the village, we would encounter a variety of amorphous shapes and heights all calling themselves "Mmanwu."

They never spoke. They only groaned, shrieked, cackled, or mumbled. Their job was not to clarify, it was to provoke and affect. In fact, obfuscation was their intention. It was in their best interest to remain unclear because it was in their best interest to keep the crowd afraid. In the ceremonies I was used to, fear was part of the costume and it was to be played with—but only by the masked. However, the air in Benin was different. Since Christianity had come into my hometown and taken its place as the only religion worthy of emulation and admiration, the masks were relegated to a more ceremonial and theatrical role. Meanwhile, in Benin, there was an even thinner veil between what happened on that very day of the festival and what happened every other day of the year. I saw it in the way the presence of the masked spirits did not argue with the presence of the human spirits. More than fear, there was reverence. Even when we saw a towering whirlwind of purple raffia vibrate through the roads of Porto Novo, protected and praised by a group of energetic men, singing with all their might, pouring libations straight from the bottle into the air, or from their mouths onto the floor—I rarely saw people who wanted to run away. All I saw were humans inching, squeezing, and almost begging to come forward.



"The dead are free" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing a "Fula mask" from Sierra Leone, sculpted by woodworker Santigie



"On a solid foundation" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing a "Krio mask" from Sierra Leone sculpted by woodworker Santigie

Every meaning requires a support, or a vehicle, or a holder. These are the bearers of meaning, and without them no meaning would cross from me to you, or from you to me, or indeed from any part of nature to any other part."

George Kubler. 'The Shape of Time'

WHAT IS IT THAT I'M LOOKING AT THAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND, AND WHY DON'T I UNDERSTAND IT?"

Revival. Resurrection. Archaeology. A historian, like a sculptor, must open our perspective by shaping time and space. In the third part, artist Sheila Chukwulozie uncovers the mystery buried under the mask through the process of history - why human beings need to approach The mask unearthed in Sanxingdui came so close to extracting the truth of time. Why is the present history? If we look at Hegel's classic time theory, the mask is not a product of the past, but something that we have continuously excavated and unearthed. What happens when the utensils are used?

Earlier in March this year, one of the ancient Sanxingdui masks went viral on Chinese social media. It was the subject of both speculation and engagement. The masks themselves are so far from what the Chinese recognize in themselves that some people believe they must have been beamed down to earth along with aliens of the old world. Interestingly, the features that may be difficult to decipher amongst Chinese people have existed elsewhere outside the Chinese landscape. In West African culture, the figure with bulging eyes and a restful face is a figure built to personify patience and composure as the ultimate character of goodness that is the highest form of beauty- a beauty that cultivates truth and creates a safe space for truth to admit itself. "To do this, in Yoruba," writes Chris Abani, "it is said that one must cultivate patience, suuru. Patience is the shape respect takes."

Yoruba masks are myths in themselves. Like myths, they do not represent the visible but make things visible. They have representational -more than actual- power; rather than a simple effort to purely conceal, the masks are called to evoke emotions that open channels of communication between spirits and their devotees. For instance, the feature of still and yet bulging eyes is not foreign to the Yoruba face figures that have been made thousands and thousands of years ago. There is a particular wooden mask called the "Iya Nla" (bearded mother).



She takes her place as the oldest and wisest mask paraded underneath a veil during the annual Gelede festival, celebrated with colourful masquerades, carved and created in the spirit and essence of awon iya wa (our mothers). Out of all the masks paraded during the Gelede festival, the Iya Nla is the only face figure that is concealed and taken through the town at the night. A strong paradox lies in that ritual: to parade a concealed face figure is to parade its potential power that must never be revealed for like the sun, if you see too much you will burn. The essence of the Yoruba mother is supposed to be that strong. A particular feature of that strength lives in the long piece of wood carved to represent a beard, hanging below the strong chin on the Great Mother's inner spirit. But more importantly, the carver's focus on the projection of the facial features from the rest of the mask draws the viewer's eye to the abnormally bulging eyes. Her closed, bulging eyes evoke the Yoruba concept of Oju inu which roughly translates as inner eye or insight. The restful, but bulging closed eyes of this figure is similar to the same pose of the Janus plaque gotten from Ijebu and created sometime in the 18th/19th century. With the Yoruba concept of oju innu (which translates as insight), it is reasonable to assume that the bulge in the eyes represents the symbolic knowledge that the artist places in the head of the figure. By choosing such simple but bold metaphors, the artist provides the audience with a physical manifestation of Aje that claims and collects the kind of calmness and composure that signifies regality and wisdom in Yoruba culture, for both men and women. Seemingly harmless, this calm should also be questioned because, in reality, a calm woman may be a woman afraid to be anything else. Besides, as Henry Drewal noted, there is a social expectation for women to claim maturity by outgrowing any expression of angst:

"Young girls who are impatient, lack self-control and exhibit anger are not generally thought to possess aje for their temperamental and fickle natures would expose and dissipate a power that must remain a mystery"

Here, female silence is seen as a virtue, elegance, and home training.

Dignity in itself has always been a mask. As opposed to a face that is easily riled up by the conditions of this harsh world, a face with restful eyes, and pursed lips presents to us the ideal secret and cool mind that Henry Drewal emphasizes as essential to the feminine power of unpredictability. Using techniques of relief in wood carving, the artist depicts a bulging forehead by creating a significant depth between the eyeballs and the eye socket. This bulging forehead suggests that an Aje's mind is always at work. Therefore, regardless of a sleeping restful face, her power should never be diminished.

We also have to ask ourselves: what makes these masks so ideal? What made them so desirable in the first place? What's the point of these facial expressions that we describe as "exaggerated"? If hyperbole is an exaggeration of the ordinary, how much do we know about the so-called "ordinary" at the time?



"Fula Mask", carved by woodworker Santigie

Why care about these old masks now?

"any work of art is actually a portion of arrested happening,"

George Kubler, 'The Shape of Time.'

"Doing maths," writes Jordan Ellenberg, "is to be at once touched by fire and bound by reason." Sculpture as an art form lives and dies by this same paradox. The fire is the human passion and intuition that motivates a sculptor to pick up her tools and her medium. But the reason is what the sculptor encounters when the fire has passed and all that's left is the space between what Time can offer and how the material receives the offer Time makes. Sculptures are often fixed by necessity. This helps us look into the aesthetics any art-making society would have considered necessary to explore. What excess was necessary. What made the bronze carvers in the Yellow River think they deserved to spend hours upon hours carrying casted limb after limb, eye after eye, part after part to complete a towering face that seems to say "MONSTERS!" if you look real close...maybe too close.



Historicisation—looking real close|too close— as a way of looking is relatively new. Kubler explains it best' "The systematic study of things is less than five hundred years old, beginning with the description of works of art in the artists' biographies of the Italian Renaissance. The method was extended to the description of all kinds of things only after 1750. Today archaeology and ethnology treat material culture in general. The history of art treats the least useful and most expressive products of human industry. The family of things begins to look like a smaller family than people once thought." Historicisation is a move toward building a collective community in the way that we cannot do it by merely putting up advertisements for diverse hires we do not mean to treat as equals. Historicisation gives us the evidence to demand equality as an intelligent pattern of nature, and not as a pity that man can afford to serve or withhold whenever he or she wishes.

As opposed to the history of a thing, the historicisation of a thing is extracted from the reality of the time in which it was an "is" and not a "was". The thing itself becomes a bit less urgent, especially because we see that we probably would have, survived with or without it. The itch to wonder what life before was about, is apparently a new itch which we have only begun to scratch.

Renaissance. Resurrection. Archaeology.

These three words feel like the same traveller facing three routes to the same destination.

Each path is laid out using a different material.

Archaeology is a road paved with hard earthly matters that have no choice but to be sculpted.

Whenever sculpture is around, the word "relief " is close by. Technically, relief is an artistic impression made upon what could have remained flat, including Time. And time is what the historian chisels with her sharp questions. Relief from the weight of living an unexamined life should be the new definition of history. In the world of sculpture, relief involves other extractive words like "chiselling," "carving," and "gouging" because relief is a hard-won glory. It is an artist's attempt to penetrate a material that often boasts of impenetrability. A material like bronze...

"Nothing gets made unless it is desirable."

We must also ask ourselves: What has made these masks so desirable? What made them so desirable at the time that they were born? What was so desirable about these facial expressions which we now term "exaggerated." If exaggerated is hyperbole to what is considered usual, what do we know about what was usual then? If perception is a thing that changes with the time, how are we measuring our normal against theirs some 2000 years Before Christ was born? Sometimes I think of it as I think of the first time I realized that the people in black and white movies were not themselves, black and white— that it was the tool of perception that made them greyscale, not existence itself. "Like crustaceans, we depend for survival upon an outer skeleton, upon a shell of historic cities and houses filled with things belonging to definable portions of the past," writes Kubler.

Without a plan to be a hero, that old farmer living along the Yellow River in southwest China found himself in such a position in 1929. This farmer is probably not you, but this farmer did exist. Perhaps, not in the way that I have laid out for us, but in a way that we may surprisingly find so human. In a way, the real farmer with the past life has become almost as monumental as his finds, calcified in the opening paragraphs about the jade ware he discovered. Monumental meaning large, yes. But monumental, also meaning detached from the very commonness that drove him into his backyard to dig; And instead of striking water, striking stone. "The ruins were accidentally discovered by a farmer when he unearthed a bright piece of jade while digging a ditch in 1929," writes almost every new entry about the discovery of Sanxingdui historic ruins that cemented the Shang dynasty as the society of invention and innovation that we have come to know it as. However, we cannot afford to forget that it is always tricky to make a simple plan for a future and somehow, walk into 5000 years ago. Why must we remember? Because we are all that farmer. Minding our business until the information reaches our screens that a large beautiful golden mask has just been found. What do we do? Do we turn away and keep digging for what was on our minds, or do we face what has risen to the surface right before our very eyes?





"Oya's Landing" - Sheila Chukwulozie wearing Sierra Leone's hollow-handed chieftain mask

*Masks ask
The mask asks
Do masks ask
What the masks ask?*

In George Kubler's hit book, "The Shape of Time," he writes;

"Knowing the past is as astonishing a performance as knowing the stars. Astronomers look only at old light. There is no other light for them to look at. This old light of dead or distant stars was emitted long ago and it reaches us only in the present..The astronomer and the historian both deal with past events perceived in the present. Here the parallels diverge, for the astronomer's future events are physical and recurrent ones, while the historian's are human and unpredictable ones." A historian is a sculptor, with time as her primary material. And to justify our work, we must justify theirs. Our work is to open the window of perception and let in perspective. The work of the historian now is the work of the farmer in 1929. To wake up and justify getting out of bed to dig and dig and dig until something is found in the reserves of our experience-- be it water, or be it stone.



Sheila Chukwulozie

Sheila Chukwulozie is a curator, writer and artist living in Nigeria. Chukwulozie is from Lagos and her work has been exhibited in countries such as Ghana, South Africa, Czech Republic and the United States. She gravitates towards the power of art to transcend reality and change mindsets, specializing in new approaches that integrate art and political theory for the development of Africa. Her past work includes studying and creating with traditional mask makers and textile makers in eight African countries as a Thomas J. Watson Fellow.



Conversations @ The Sahara Centre

How to protect your Intellectual Property as a Creative Industry Agent.

Speaker's Profile

Sotonye Amachree is a Legal Practitioner called to the Nigerian Bar in 2004 and an accredited Mediator by the Lagos Multi-door Court House. She is a Senior Associate in the Law Firm, Ajumogobia & Okeke, Lagos Nigeria, and has been in active legal practice for 17 years. She has gained practical experience in Commercial Litigation, Arbitration/ADR Practice, and has worked on several cases for the firm's multinational and local clients. She has practical experience in advising clients on Contracts generally to aid their business transactions in a fast-paced business world.



Sotonye Amachree

Watch the full conversation [here](#)

Notes

The last edition of the conversations looked at understanding Intellectual Property Rights and how to protect them as a creative industry agent. Here are a few highlights of the conversation:

1. Intellectual property which can be regarded as intellectual goods is a theme that has not been fully embraced by young creatives, especially in Nigeria.
2. Intellectual property is any creation that comes from one's mind or intellectual ability. It is regarded as a creator's original piece that should and ought to be protected. However, as far as intellectual property rights go, quite a few people working in the creative industry rarely appreciate their works and hardly see the need to seek protection for their intellectual property. Just like traditional property is protected legally, there is also the need for people to ensure that their ideas are protected against infringement.
3. Hence, to guard against infringement, creatives must first ensure to register their intellectual property with the Copyright Commission. The law in Nigeria makes provision for the protection of an individual's intellectual property which is detailed in the Copyright Act 2004. This piece of legislature grants an individual the legal backing to seek redress in the event of copyright infringement. In addition to copyright which protects an individual's intellectual property, there are other categories such as patent, trademark, and trade secret. Additionally, there are necessary conditions for registration that give the full backing of the law.
4. There are several conditions for registration under the Copyright Act. The work must be original and not copied. It must also be fixed, that is, converted into something that is tangible for easy accessibility. All these conditions make it easy for a lawyer to seek redress for his client if an infringement occurs. Nigerian Law through the Federal High Court is strict in the protection of one's intellectual property provided that these conditions are met.
5. Creatives also need to take proper care when entering business dealings with a second party: Hence they must ensure that there is first and foremost a contract. A contract protects the rights of creatives and ensures that they get the best deals for their transactions and further guards them if the business transaction goes south.
6. Intellectual Property rights are transferable, which means a person could be signing a contract for a piece of work that does not belong to the seller. Therefore, creatives need to examine the title of the intellectual property and conduct a proper investigation before signing.
7. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, creatives must consult with a lawyer. The importance of having adequate legal protections during business transactions cannot be overemphasized, which is why Ajumogobia & Okeke offer their services to creatives seeking legal consultations.

Ajumogobia & Okeke contact details:

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The Man of God

A Review by Obinna Okerekeocha



Credit: Netflix

The Man of God' directed by Bolanle Austen-Peters is now showing on Netflix. Please note that this review contains spoilers. Continue at your own risk.

I watched this one with an open mind, not knowing what to expect. In the end, I was left gasping...not for air but for answers.

The movie opens with Jude Chukwuka (Prophet Josiah Obalolu) leading prayers in a church and that pretty much sets the tone for the whole movie. Clearly, he is a no-nonsense pastor who disciplines his children for leaving the service midway. This is typical of some Christian parents, in Nigeria at least.

Being a cinephile, I found the cinematography in *The Man of God* to be two-tiered. In the scene where an older Sam (Akah Nnani), is introduced under the spotlight, the camera movement is smooth, the aesthetic is cinematic, and when the show is over, they walk to the green room where Sam and Rex (Dorcas Shola Fapson) embrace, that picture is gorgeous. The depth of field is so pure! The softness of a high fidelity 35mm film camera accompanied by the well-calibrated cinematic lighting, hugs you. But all of this is suddenly cast out when Sam walks down the stairs outside to meet Teju (Osas Ighodaro). I am left wondering...what happened to the gorgeous cinematic heaven I was in a moment ago? That opening scene was clearly shot by cinematographer Lance Gewer, and I guess a second unit took over? The difference in quality is obvious.

As the movie progresses, I cannot help the feelings of nostalgia at seeing snippets of the University of Lagos' Senate building and their Faculty of Arts; I grew up in Akoka, Yaba and this was quite special for me. That aerial shot of the school with the metallic lollipop-looking structure that's completely unmissable as you drive down the school just screamed out scenes from all my fondest memories.

Speaking of nostalgia, I struggled to place the period in which *The Man of God* is set. From context clues, we're clearly supposed to assume it's set in the late 90s to early 2000s. For example, we are shown a lot of handwritten notes to indicate that mobile phones were not accessible. Therefore, I was quite puzzled when I saw a modern LED flat-screen television in Rex's apartment. Those did not exist at the time. We had rear projection televisions that stood on the floor. Furthermore, the costume design felt too contemporary, at least to me.

There was one thing however that must be spoken of in an impressive light. The Bina Siemens monitor with the Windows 98 interface was very era-appropriate.

Details matter.

I have a few gears to grind with the dynamics of the love affair between Sam and his three love interests. Joy (Atlanta Bridget Johnson) is Teju's friend and a leader in their school fellowship. Teju introduces her to Sam and like a kingfisher catching the sunlight for the first time, he falls hopelessly in love with her.

He literally feels joy being with her. We have seen a plethora of movies and TV shows/series on Netflix about how love affairs/stories evolve. In 'The Man of God', the love stories do not evolve at all. They just emerge!

In just about 3 scenes, a serious love affair ensues. There was no conflict. Joy, a devoutly religious person is not shown to struggle with the relationship in any way, she instantly accepts Sam.

And why do we always go this route of 'having ice cream', 'photoshoot pose stance' for showcasing relationships in their infancy? There must be better and more compelling ways of telling that story. This approach has become a bit pedestrian.

At some point, it felt like The Man of God was rudderless. What was the movie really about? What is the subtext? Is this about apparent corruption in modern-day Pentecostal assemblies? Surviving abuse? The journey to self-actualization? The consequences of greed?

The movie fails at developing character arcs. We witness the abuse by Sam's Dad for going out to play during a church service but at no point do we see a young Sam's passion for music. We should have. This would have been a great precursor to his musical abilities which we see manifested as he performs at the 'The Night of Afro-Jazz'. How did Sam become so invested in music? What are the origins of his musical abilities?

For the director, the opportunity to showcase a theatrical Afrobeats live show on-screen was irresistible! BAP breathes theatre! She built an artistic performance empire with Terra Kulture and surely we had to see it in all its glory. This was the moment and Netflix was the stage!

The timelines were unclear...

At some point, Joy graduates from university leaving Sam behind because he had a carry-over, and after Joy leaves. Teju remains. Did Teju also have to repeat a year or had she been a junior? Suddenly, we hear that Joy is married? Just like that? And pastor BJ was still in school? Did he also have an extra year? These questions are never answered.

Then we see a woman pregnant with the child of the married music director of a big church, we only see this lady twice on screen and that's it, literally. We do not get to meet her properly, we cannot empathize with her, in fact, we barely care because NO attention was given to the character. Then her sister comes to seek justice, but that whole story just fizzles out! Talk about not firing Chekhov's Gun! The Man of God does not score any points here!

As for the acting, 'The Man of God' showcases some brilliant Nigerian talent. It was a breath of fresh air seeing Eucharia Anunobi on screen (as Rev. Mrs Gift Asuquo) after such a long time. She gave moments! Like the Queen that she is, she was placed on a throne-like chair serving a performance deserving of royal applause. Her scenes were perhaps my favourite.

Long story short, The Man of God is a thought-provoking piece, and definitely a move in the right direction for Nigerian cinema. The actors delivered fantastic performances, but I find that the story could have been better developed, and the dots better connected. The premise of the story has multi-dimensional interpretation but the execution left me with more questions than answers.

Have you watched The Man of God? What did you think of it?

Now streaming on Netflix.



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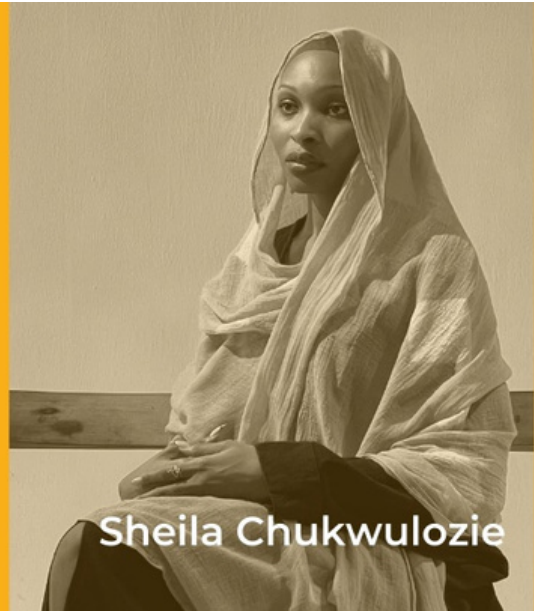
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A Day in The Life of a Performance Artist



Spotlight presents a way to get to understand a bit more about creative sector agents in Nigeria. This spotlight features Sheila Chukwulozie. Sheila is a writer and performance artist who is passionate about the power of art to transcend reality and change mindsets

A brief bio

Sheila Chukwulozie is a writer, filmmaker, tea maker and performance artist. As a writer, the essay is her way of combining memory and theory, dream and myth, rumour and fact. As a performance artist, her aim is to get paid to live a life other than hers for a few days, months, or years. She lives with her sister, her two nieces, one nephew, and their dog, Bingo (how cliché).

What time does your alarm go off?

Which alarm? The first or the 18th?

What do your mornings look like?

My mornings look like turning off the AC, crystals on my window, palo santo, apple cider vinegar and hot water by a very tiny balcony, resisting the urge to smoke yet another cigarette, the great big sky and its old friend, the rising sun. I love the rising sun.

Tell us what a typical day looks like...

I don't have typical days.

How did you get into this career path?

You mean into “these career paths” yes? I have a few career paths all hinged upon my talent as a wordsmith. I have worked in offices and corporations since I was 16. I started my first non-profit organisation when I was turning 17 years old. I went to an A level school that was all about entrepreneurship and leadership. This meant that I was trained to see opportunity in any roadblock. My mother also works in a huge market in Lagos. It's so huge, the running joke is that you can find body parts if you wanted to. Maybe it's not really a joke, but I choose to laugh and hope it is. Anyway. Being the child of a hustler means that I was born into a hustler's world. I understood at a very age that whatever you found worth doing was whatever you could do as a job. My mother has worked as a seamstress, a shoe and bag seller, a cement trader, a chalk manufacturer, a filling station manager/trainee, an English professor, a french tutor, etcetera, etcetera. It's so funny how she continuously asks me when I'm going to get one real, good job, meanwhile, I grew up seeing her have so many. So I guess even before my A levels education, I have always understood that one's work was supposed to accompany one's lived life and not the other way around. So instead of looking around to see what was being sold to me as the only possible option, I always started from what I was already doing and enjoying. I had often won English awards as a child. I remember being asked to lead the morning assemblies in my primary school because the teachers loved to hear me read. Even while we were praying, my parents were always very impressed with how I read out these really long elaborate catholic prayers. I've always loved words. And in turn, words have always loved me. By the time I was in college, I figured that words are only one letter away from worlds. I saw words to be the invisible but irreplaceable concrete upon which worlds were built. and human-centered design (design thinking) to my toolbox.

Can you share some of your most memorable moments?

Spending two weeks in Mali, going back and forth between Abouabakar Fofana's studio and his farm in the middle of nowhere. Spending one month with my friend's mother in Freetown who was never taught to read English but spent her whole day listening to BBC on the radio. She had her favourite TV show on Zee world about these two lovers- Pragya and Ranjid. And for some reason, the day before each new episode came out, there would be pages and pages of facebook posts, narrating the whole episode that was about to premiere. And guess what she would do? She would ask me to read the posts aloud to her. Then the next day, we would watch exactly what we had just read the day before. So funny. I miss walking through St. Louis in Senegal and just smelling this really piercing scent of the ocean that I have never since then, smelled anywhere else in the world. It smelled like both blood and salt. I loved seeing how people would chase their goats into the ocean for a bath. I have too many memorable moments. Sometimes I feel like an old woman. Send me a rocking chair if you love me.

What do you love the most about your job?

I love that it is imperative that I transform to have something to write about. I love the listening I have to do to speak with any substance. I love that attention is the hefty price I have to pay to call myself an artist. I love that living is the research I have to fulfil to represent my characters without simply “pretending” to be someone I've never been. I actually love my job so much, and it makes me emotional to sit and realize that I am overflowing with reasons I love my job.

What do you not like about your job?

I hate the debtors I meet on my road as a freelance artist. I hate having to threaten artisans who consistently overpromise and then underdeliver. I don't like dealing with the snobs in the creative industry. I don't think bullies are cute. I also don't like dealing with people who insist on asking questions like “SO WHAT'S THIS THING SUPPOSED TO MEAN?” once they step into a gallery/show/experience. They already walk in intending to reduce things they cannot understand into things not worth understanding. I also don't enjoy when practicing what I preach comes to bite me in the ass. I've had moments as a theorist where I proposed solutions to end some worldwide inequality, only for me to go and realize that the laws of physics set some limit on the body that the mind can afford to not care about. It's a love-hate thing where the universe's lessons teach me and challenge my artistic propositions. In other words, there are many moments on this journey when I sigh and say to myself, “you know nothing, Jon Snow.”



What do you do after work?

Once again, I don't know of a moment in my life called "after work."

What do you do at the weekends?

Wax. Work.Tea. Sleep. Eat. Pray. Play. Pole dance.

Who in the creative industry (globally) inspires you and why?

Rihanna, Laurie Anderson, Simone Yvette-Leigh, Charlotte Braithwaite, Daniel Day-Lewis, Janet Jackson, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Charlize Theron, Agnes Varda, Jamie Foxx, Onyeka Onwenu, Beyonce, Toni Morrison, Eloghosa Osunde, Enajite Efemuaye, Steve Harvey, Agnes Obel, Okwui Okpokwasili, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, my mummy and last but not least: Frank Ocean. Why? Courage.

In your opinion, how can the creative industries contribute to social change/social cohesion/improve the Nigerian society?

It would be profitable if we saw that many underdeveloped and underpaid jobs need more respect. Like make-up work. Have you guys noticed how badly we treat fantasy work in this country? Is black eyeliner the only way to let someone know that they are now a monster? We also need people who do more prop work. The more realistic and safe a prop feels, the more performers can feel comfortable taking performance risks that deepen the character on stage or screen. Also, once again, pay artists. And artists/artisans pay people for their work. A "lack of discipline" is not a synonym for "freedom of expression."

If you were not doing what you are now doing, what career will you be in?

Is there a career I'm not doing now?

"What does societal change mean to you?"

The courage of the individual to express her needs and prefer her preferences.





We hope you liked our June edition. Please send all comments, questions and feedback to culture@saharacentre.org. We'd love to hear from you.

Please share with others as we continue our work to advance socio-cultural development in Nigeria.

We welcome contributors and illustrators to contribute to our upcoming editions, please send a short email with your proposed article, piece or illustration and we will get back to you. Send us a mail on culture@saharacentre.org

If you would like to lead a Conversation @ TSC, in-person or virtually, then please let us know.

About The Sahara Centre

The Sahara Centre is a not-for-profit organization focused on amplifying the impact of the Nigerian creative, cultural and tourism industry on sustainable development through research and advocacy.

We integrate the material and immaterial sociocultural factors to contribute to a Nigerian society that understands more about who it is, its ways of life, and one that can chart its evolution, anchored on a true sense of self and belongingness.

We work closely with cultural, creative, and tourism industries to ensure this anchoring participation and evolution.

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