



BIOGRAPHY: BEN ENWONWU (1917-1994)

Born in 1917 and raised in Onitsha, Nigeria, as the son of a traditional sculptor, Ben Enwonwu initially studied art under British art educator Kenneth C. Murray in the first government art program in colonial Nigeria, graduating from Government College (Nigeria) in 1934. He continued his studies in the United Kingdom, at Goldsmith College and Ruskin College, Oxford, before graduating from the Slade School of Fine Art in 1948.

Enwonwu's artworks were first shown internationally at the Zwemmer Gallery in London in 1937, one of the first international exhibitions of modern African art, and at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938. In 1946, Enwonwu represented Africa at the *International Exhibition of Modern Art* at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. Enwonwu exhibited his work in a series of shows in New York, Boston and Howard University in 1950. That same year, Enwonwu held a major exhibition at Gallery Apollinaire in Milan.

Two of Enwonwu's most well known sculptures are Queen Elizabeth II's commissioned sculpture, marking the first African artist to be commissioned by the Queen, and his iconic sculpture of *Anyanwu*, the Igbo sun god, a version of which is permanently installed at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York.

In Nigeria, Enwonwu served as Art Supervisor of the Colonial Office upon his return from his studies in 1948. Enwonwu also worked as the cultural advisor to the newly formed Nigerian government after independence in 1960. He also served as a teacher, writer and art critic. Enwonwu was a professor at the University of Ife, and lectured at Harvard University, New York University and Howard University in the United States. He was the Artistic Adviser to FESTAC '77, the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977.

In 1980, Enwonwu was awarded the National Order of Merit by the Nigerian government for his contribution to Nigeria's art and culture. His works have been included in exhibitions at the Tate, National Gallery of Lagos, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, PS.1 Contemporary Art Center, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Museum Villa Stuck, and Whitechapel Gallery.



BEN ENWONWU - CV/EXHIBITION HISTORY

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SCHOLARLY RESEARCH:

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- Gassman de Sousa, Bea. *Decolonising Nigerian Modernism: Ben Enwonwu's 'Identity in Politics'*, Tate Modern, Tate Papers, Autumn 2018.
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RECENT PRESS:

- **New York Times**, "Rediscovering the Art of Ben Enwonwu," by Farah Nayeri, September 24, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/24/arts/ben-enwonwu-artist-africa.html>
- **BBC News**, "Ben Enwonwu: The Nigerian painter behind Africa's Mona Lisa," by Naira Mohamud, October 17, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50071212>
- **Smithsonian Magazine**, "Family Realizes Long-Forgotten Portrait was Painted by Famed Nigerian Artist Ben Enwonwu," by Meilan Solly, July 30, 2019. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/family-realizes-long-forgotten-portrait-their-mother-was-painted-nigerian-artist-ben-enwonwu-180972764/>
- **CNN**, "Long-forgotten family portrait sells at auction for \$1.4 million," by Maisie Linford, October 17, 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/ben-enwonwu-portrait-sale/index.html>
- **CNN**, "The man who redefined what it means to be an African artist," by Chris Giles, March 24, 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/24/africa/ben-enwonwu-tutu/index.html>
- **BBC News**, "Missing Nigerian Masterpiece found in North London flat," February 7, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-42974120>
- **Financial Times**, "Ben Enwonwu: a fine African artist rediscovered," by Charlotte Jansen, September 29, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/aa1d8706-9ec8-11e7-8b50-0b9f565a23e1>

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- "African Artist Receives Rave Notices," *N-New York Amsterdam News*, September 16, 1960.
- "Ben Enwonwu, Artiste et Homme Heureux," *La Vie Africaine*, Paris, April 1963.
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- "Ben Enwonwu Speaks with Ophelia Magazine," *Ophelia Magazine*, London, 1982.
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- Abiodun, Rowland, Henry J. Drewal and John Pemberton III. *The Yoruba Artist: New Theoretical Perspectives on African Arts*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- Exhibition Center, Marina, Lagos, Nigeria, 1942.
- Berkeley Galleries, London, 1947, 1948, 1950, 1952, 1955.
- Howard University Art Gallery, Washington, DC, 1950.
- Galerie Apollinaire, Milan, 1950.
- *An Aspect of Ben Enwonwu's Art on Exhibition*, USIS, Lagos, Nigeria, 1973.
- Goethe Institute, Lagos, Nigeria, 1976.
- *Ben Enwonwu's Enwonwus: Sculptures and Paintings*, Royal Society of British Artists, The Mall Galleries, London, 1985.
- *Celebration of Excellence*, Royal Commonwealth Society, London, 2005.
- *The Iya Oge of Lagos*, Quintessence Gallery, 2003.
- *Ben Enwonwu MBE: Seven Decades of Artistic Production*, Gallery of African Art (GAFRA), London, 2015.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- Zwemmer Gallery, London, July 6-August 7, 1937.
- *Empire Exhibition*, Glasgow, Scotland, 1938.
- *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris, France, 1946.
- *Independence Exhibition*, Lagos, 1960.
- *Kunst aus Zentralafrika*, Berlin, Bremen, Dortmund and Darmstadt, Germany, 1960.
- *Art from African of our Time*, Phelps-Stokes Fund, New York, 1961.
- *Exhibition Centre*, Marina, Lagos, Nigeria, 1964.
- *International Art Exhibition*, Lusaka, Zambia, 1964.
- *Treasures from the Commonwealth*, Royal Academy of Art, London, 1965.
- *Contemporary African Art*, Camden Arts Center, 1969.
- *Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary African Art*, Africa Centre, London, 1973.
- *Nigerian Art in the 70s*, University of Ife, Nigeria, 1976.
- *National Art Exhibition*, National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria, 1976.
- *FESTAC '77*, Lagos, Nigeria, 1977.
- *Moderne Kunst in Afrika*, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1980.
- *Exhibition of Nigerian Contemporary Art*, Dakar, Senegal, 1980.
- *Exhibition of Nigerian Contemporary Art*, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1983.
- *Man in Focus*, National Theatre, Lagos, 1985.



- *A Tale of Two Continents*, Quintessence, Lagos, Nigeria, 1990.
- *Take your road and travel along*, Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, 2008.
- *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1995.
- *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa*, 1945-1994, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago - MCA Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2001.
- *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa*, 1945-1994, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, 2001.
- *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa*, 1945-1994, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island, New York NY, 2002.

COLLECTIONS

- Smithsonian, National Museum of African Art
- United Nations Headquarters, New York
- The Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace
- Access Bank Art Collection
- Prominent public and private collections in Africa, United States, Europe, India, and Japan.