

THE BRITISH MUSEUM INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME 2021



ITP 2021 REPORT OSARU OBASEKI, EDO STATE, NIGERIA. (MARCH 12-APRIL 10TH)

INTRODUCTION

My name is Osaru Obaseki a visual artist with Edo Global Art Foundation and the Assistant General Secretary of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), Edo state chapter. My art practice revolves around the understanding and research on the Benin history and cultural heritage, interpreting and representing these ancient narratives and history through contemporary art while infusing and repositioning modern day realities.

I participated in the re-entanglement project with the University of Cambridge handled by Professor Paul Basu and was part of the indigenous artists who interrogated the archives of Northcote W. Thomas, who was a British anthropologist that documented the Edo speaking people between 1909-1910. During this project I created a piece that showing transition and how Edo women have evolved over time with their sense of style and outlook whilst highlighting motifs and wall writings referenced in the archival photos.

Kindly find links: https://re-entanglements.net/osaru_obaseki_re-entanglements-net/

Osaru Obaseki, *The Journey amidst Time*



My participation in the 2021 International Training Programme (ITP) with the British Museum has exposed me to a broader understanding of the Museum operations and its history and I gained a lot of knowledge around the art community in London and Scotland. With all I learnt, this empowered me with a lot of confidence and clarity regarding my work practice and how I can expand on my narrative which pushes for cultural evolution resonating around one's sense of identity and value as a people.

BENEFITS OF the ITP

My experience with the British Museum in London, United Kingdom was a great privilege and an opportunity to be exposed to the behind the scenes everyday operations of this great institution - the British Museum, engaging with curators and professionals from different departments and those from the UK Partner Museums. I could see how cultures can be preserved and better understood as well as thinking of new ways to better represent these narratives to the constant evolving audiences who visit heritage institutions.

It was great connecting with museum professionals from 14 different countries from around the world in the 2021 cohort. This created an environment to experience different cultures, languages and new perspectives which made me see the need for versatility in museums just as the BM is today- rich in different displays from different cultures and countries from around the world.

My most engaging time at the BM was during my departmental sessions where I got accustomed to the storage and handling of objects from the Africa department . Great narrations and conversations with Julie Hudson, curator in the Africa department, I was able to physically connect and interrogate, especially with the Benin collections and objects on display. We had conversations on how to better develop deeper research on the objects in the BM collections through engaging and collaborating with the indigenous communities for better representation of the objects and even better perspective of the people living where these objects come from in order for the right narratives to be passed on to the engaging audiences. That is to say these objects and artifacts should not just be represented for only aesthetics' sake.

Visit to the UK Partner museum, Glasgow:

I met with Patricia Allan and Ed Johnson and had conversations with them, and our trips to different Glasgow museums opened my mind to the possibilities of expanding my practice into the space of museums, interacting with substantial archives that identify with me and my home community whilst pushing for modern day contemporary art spaces that best represent the narrative of stringing together both the ancient and the modern in art.

Patricia Allan, Curator of World Cultures, Glasgow Museums:

"As Glasgow museums changes its relationship with its colonial past we are increasingly commissioning contemporary artists to tell the histories of their countries' heritage. Osaru brought fresh perspective to our understanding of the history and culture of Benin city and the Edo people. Her work has inspired us to look beyond one shared period in history and look at the art of Benin today. We are very excited by the possibility of working with Osaru on the reinterpretation of our Benin display".

Katie Bruce, Producer curator, Gallery of Modern art(GOMA):

Our REF: KB/ OsaruObaseki

8 May 2022

Glasgowlife

It was wonderful to meet the artist Osaru Obaseki as part of the recent British Museum International Training Programme. As we met in the context of the GoMA exhibition *Revisiting the Work of Black Artists in Scotland through new Collecting*, we were able to discuss her painting and sculptural practice and the connections through the mediums that she works with to artists represented there – particularly Tam Joseph. Her work, however pushes those materials in different directions while retaining a research based approach to their use. These were exciting perspectives to think about in relation to Glasgow Museums' collection and how artists are working to disrupt and expand on traditions of painting and sculpture.



Katie Bruce
Producer Curator, Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA)

Priorities for changes in my home organization will have a lot to do with repositioning, reversioning, creating of better platforms and an enabling environment to properly engage the audience around the indigenous and immediate communities as well as the art community. Creation of gift shops branded in the themes of the institutions which I have seen, can be a big attraction to audiences, as well as creation of more indigenous content such as: selling of historical stories through relatable display forms and techniques, materials and gift items.

The ITP has given me more momentum to embark on a project which entails creating an accumulation of scarification marks, Benin motifs and iconographies, highlighting their meanings and symbolisms – this can be reference for research and better understanding of these symbols that are found on the bronzes and wall writings in Benin.

THE GLOBAL NETWORK OF THE ITP

It's a great privilege to be a fellow of the large network of the International Training Programme, with people and institutions who share the same/diverse vision and values around history, cultural heritage , capacity building and the art community all over the world. Great privilege indeed.

This opens a wide range of cultural exchange, knowledge sharing and various ways to deliberate on ideas and issues around our communities and institutions across with great professionals within the ITP global network who can engage with one another.

A very big thank you to the De Laszlo Foundation for their generous sponsorship and support for my participation in the ITP 2021 which has helped me expand my network and build a firm relationship with international museum professionals and a global museum network. The ITP, with the British museum has been a great opportunity and I am very grateful to the sponsors and supporters of the ITP and the entire ITP team.