

and later introduced this medium to the students of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos. She further engages the calabash, not only as an object for artistic exploration, but as art itself in an article entitled 'Calabashes as Receptacles of Traditional Medicine and Repositories of Culture Amongst the Yoruba People of South Western Nigeria'.⁷ *Oba ghato okpere*, like all other works in this installation reveals Layiwola's ability to switch between practice and historical/cultural interpretation of form.

Calabashes are of immense importance to royalty in Africa. Apart from being vessels for kola nuts, palm wine, water, food, white chalk, grains, clothes, jewelry etc., they are also used for drums, guitars, decorations and in offering sacrifices to the gods. In the old Oyo Empire, with which the Benin are said to have filial relationship, calabash served in the symbolic political role of dethronement. Any king offered a covered calabash was indirectly instructed to abdicate the throne by committing suicide after looking at the forbidden contents of the calabash. These are some of the uses to which calabashes were put in Africa. By using calabashes in her works for the exhibition, Layiwola is exhibiting resourcefulness as an artist and a student of culture, elevating a traditional utilitarian cultural symbol of her people to the level of modern artistic expression. Calabashes come in various shapes and sizes and as such evoke different feelings in people, especially when subjected to various artistic manipulations.

The twist in symbolic significance of calabash to royalty is worthy of note here. Calabash, which in ancient times served as 'quit notice' to the king is now employed to wish the king long life in a conceptual installation composition comprising 113 calabashes representing the number of years since the expedition. These are suspended painted calabashes, having names of past obas inscribed on them. The interregnum period is represented with plainly painted calabashes. *Oba ghato okpere*, in a subtle way attempts a recap of Benin history as a window through which the context of the exhibition and advocacy can be understood.

Chequered History III (fig. 95) revisits the partitioning and sharing of African states amongst Western countries like commodities in 1884. The work evokes the travails of Africa and Africans consequent upon contact with the West. It evokes and laments the destruction and disorientation of a once great flourishing civilisation. It condemns the ravaging greed of the West which till now manifests in the aiding and abetting of criminal African looter-leaders and excavators and looters of cultural property. The non-figurative piece has designs and motifs depicted in draught-board like compartments, alluding to the power playground which Africa was, and still is, since contact with the West. This is the nature of conceptual art, especially works with explosive themes bordering on historic inhumanity and injustice.

Theatre of War (fig. 94), done in terracotta and copper wire is an assemblage of graphitised terracotta tiles, each chronicling a fragment of the Benin expedition story.

In Praise of God, (Triptych - Polyester, Copper foil and Aluminum foil, fig. 83) a piece on which is inscribed about 132 different names of God, reminds one of the character, Mary in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*,⁸ fond of flamboyant praise of God. It also reminds one of the various Pentecostal panegyrics and cosmetic religiosity in the Nigerian state. In this work, Layiwola may on the one hand be giving a deserved glory to God and on the other, she may be lampooning the over-religiosity and hypocrisy of Nigerians; a situation in which a civil servant who reads the bible passage in church on Sunday and sings and prays the loudest in the church will on Monday morning embezzle billions of tax payers' money, thereby depriving the masses of basic amenities in the Nigerian state.

The moulds of the Benin terracotta heads for the exhibition are also arranged to form part of the works for the exhibition. This is in the tradition of eminent Nigerian artist and printmaker, Bruce