

Onobrakpeya, who out of resourcefulness has turned many of his printmaking plates and lino templates into alluring and engaging works of art. In this way, both artists extend the physical life of an art object. The models remain as the positive casts while the moulds themselves (in this case the negatives) transform into yet another work of art. In the case of *Benin1897.com*, the moulds for the monumental installation of Benin ancestral heads continue the discourse (fig. 106). The question mark may refer to: What next in the restitution question?

*Benin1897.com*, undoubtedly will raise more issues than can be figured in the exhibits. It will reverberate more in the realms of ideas and conscientisation which are expected to yield the stolen artefacts to their rightful owners. This is the nature of conceptual works, especially one with an explosive theme such as *Benin1897.com*.

### **Matters Arising**

*Benin1897.com* has no doubt extended the echo of the touring exhibition of stolen Benin artefacts to vicinities where the originals were stolen and which were not intended to be reached by the touring exhibition. It has again reopened the unhealed wounds of cruelty and inhumanity inflicted on the Benin by the British.

The hypocrisy of the West is revealed in the fact that these same looted artefacts were previously disparaged, and derogatorily referred to as heathen, fetish, primitive and therefore, less art. The amazing elevation from primitivism to coveted artefacts is typical of the shameless somersaults and abracadabra of unprincipled people. These same 'heathen', 'demonic' and 'fetish' objects now have new shrines built for them by Western idolaters.

The role of some African rulers in the entire episode is despicable. Apart from the fact of not mounting enough pressure on the West for the return of the artefacts, they in their ignorance and recklessness continue to give or sign away our precious heritage. Yakubu Gowon reportedly yanked one Benin piece from the National Museum, Lagos, and made a present of it to the visiting Queen to add to her surfeit collection. Aremu Obasanjo signed away to the French priceless Nok terracottas in return for nondescript training of Nigerian culture workers in the West.<sup>9</sup> Whereas the West has countless African masterpieces that can go round, one piece per city or town, it is doubtful whether in spite of Monet's, Van Gogh's, Picasso's, Matisse's, etc., large oeuvres, there is an original by any of these Western artists in any part of Africa. This prodigal and uninformed attitude of these African rulers is detestable and retrogressive.

It is unquantifiable the amount of income and good luck Africa is losing on her artefacts exiled in the West. The West is buoyant and progressive today not only because of her resources or technical know-how but also because of the resources accruing as a result of visits to the various galleries and museums where the artefacts are kept and also because of the spiritual aura of good luck engendered by African ancestors represented by the artefacts. A return of all the displaced African artefacts is one of the panaceas to African problems. This restorative angle should not be trivialised, the West has realised this and that is one of the reasons they are holding tight to the works.

*Benin1897.com* should be placed in the right perspective and should not be seen as a mere academic or creative exercise. The clamour for restitution and reparation today is civil and done within the ambit of the law; it may not be so in times to come. A lesson should be drawn from the crises in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which started out as grunts but later escalated to uncontrollable proportions. The present generation of Africans may be talking and jaw-jawing, future generations may not be this silent and pliable about this injustice. This should not be taken as a call to illegal means of redressing the wrongs but happenings in different parts of the world