Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it. This Nigerian adage captures the essence of the work of Enukpa Okeke, and provides a key to a meaningful contemplation of his philosophical and ideational underpinnings. This adage indeed becomes a metaphor that shapes this contemplation in the ensuing discourse, reflecting on the formal and discursive underpinnings of his art. This discourse's core is its examination of the different dimensions of his art and the nature of his corpus.

Enukpa's oeuvre evokes the objectification of a philosophical principle which he mercurially calls "the dialogue and duality." This is the marital syntax from which his manifestos come in life and death a dialogue between the two and the truth. They are the perceptions within which we live and laugh and cry. grow and decay. This duality appears in varying dimensions throughout the complex of issues and ideas and has been very importantly the determining factor in the visualization of my experiences. I speak of and as art contained in the notion of our thought and action. I speak of the physical and metaphysical as represented in the human experience. I speak of our quest, our agonies in the strife of existence. I speak above all of life and death as (individual) entities.

What was the motive of art then? What type of work did it produce? This manifests itself often in a dialogue between the title of a work and the resulting artwork. By sanction, he was a dazzling intellectual, larger than life artist who lived, as the words of Eyinna Obi, "the revolutionist of art," that he created, profoundly said, as if to demonstrate that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This argument was further explored at the end of life. It was a fact, and eventually becomes to be demonstrated, not merely by the large family of three wives and eight children, but in his oeuvre. His achievement is so significant that the achievement of more than a generation of artists, a generation of artists, no amount of abstract art in an age of realist and populist education, and a generation of peers who encountered comfortably between poetics and sculpture; a commercial world, (some indeed have implied a marginality) remains a testament of their ability in reaching an end of art; in the poem of the poetic, perception of the visual artist as an aesthetic, and a rebellion of the non-representational, that thought up the (now) Nkwo Okeke of his life’s art.“

White Eagle: philosophical

ocene, his work is intense and multi

layered. It becomes a visual re

presentation and evocation of the symbols and spites which have become so much a part of our lives that we hardly notice their presence, but which may in fact circumvent our perceptions entirely. These spites speak of convergence and divergence and upon a wide field of thought, preconceived perceptions: the sensual and the resistance; good and evil; positive and negative black and white; spiral and matter; male and female, the secular and the spiritual, the physical and the metaphysical; life and death, high and low, pure and dirty - the combinations that he explores in his Dialogue Series, the gambit of work that he produced in painting and sculpture during the strict and the evolution.

Examples of those seen in his sculpture were "Pepa Poi" (1970), and "The Gauntlet (1977). In these titles, he has an understanding of the art form as the wedding of life and death, positive and negative, the inevitable dialogue that orders cosmic relationships. In Tororo, "Iro bi" means "mother of twins;" his abode in the descriptive title for the mother of any other worldly child who makes his journey into this world - a child who chooses his mother, and does not select to be born again and again. Enukpa's sculptures, carved in red sand, are usually big, keeping with his practice of working only for the largest possible numbers. Regardless of their size, the essential Enukpa's message is always present, some perceived as a necessary correctness of the world, but others existing in a mutually beneficial practice. The premise for this should be known: Enukpa's art is always infused with universal concern that are derived from dualism.

Enukpa enjoyed being in the turbulent crest generated by his controversial work. The effectiveness of which he unified conflicting concepts and seemingly oppositional roles, such as, for example, in his mutation and upbringing. "Son of a Chief" was born in 1930, and grew up by the ocean and sometimes among the artistic avant-garde in which he functioned, somehow finding his own voice, socially and aesthetically at large. His early work is an assertion of his life. And like the ancient work is steeped in an existentialist world in which compulsorily and

The Essential Enokpae

Jude Jegede

Photograph: Peter Ibe

Enukpa Okeke

108 Selections from Nigeria
commercial gears from his major creative sculptures and paintings. Furthermore, the paintings and sculptures of the early nineties should be distinguished from those he created especially, during the late seventies, when his career literally began and he became the artist handling the door for the venues in Lagos. Before and after the Fiftieth and Sixtieth of the Arts and Culture Prize (1979). However, any conception of the superfluous sculptures and figurines that he signed during this period should be read bearing in mind the enormous other pressures he was under. The overwhelming volume of work, the pressure to meet deadlines, a mortgage, the mounting obligations, and the controversy raised by his choice of the British lottery as a prize (1979) confuses the British Museum's refusal to release the original piece on loan in Britain; this painting, the prize of work from government and other quarters must have...  

second category, Enyemak moved to the central plane. where he promptly declared his art of the bounds to laymen. I cannot really expect the layman to readily understand my paintings which need a message because it needs schooling to appreciate such things..."  

Who are these laymen that Enyemak was speaking of? And what aspect of art did he do that demanded that his audience need to be schooled? To appreciate these issues, we need to place the artist within his own period - the Nigerian artists of the sixties. In the sixties, the Nigerian painters (led by Olusegun Oko) Members of the Society reacted to the patronising, unrelenting savagery for abstract works, a propaganda with realism, and a repudiation for experimental prize tags. This, in a cut-and-dried way, was different to Enyemak's laymen. But it was also a Nigeria rebelling with the rightpoundness of a creative force - that the second generation of contemporary Nigerian artists to which Enyemak belonged. The Art of Understanding - a huge mural of graven, restored, and music of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs - exemplifies Enyemak's contemporaneity's most important and profound of a period which was irregular or inconsequent form and scientific media. The title of the work itself should be subsumed under the philosophical ambience of Crusading. It provides the occurring conceptual which frames the artist's creative essence, and generous accommodation of the Other. It does more; it borns the hating of modernism as an essentially white property. Abstraction which has been appropriated by the white cultural establishment and unceremoniously installed as the soul of modernism in the art's case, modern only to the Nigerian art has always been based on abstraction. In other words, long before the decade of modern art arrived in Nigeria in the thirty years with maps and computer, bags full of brown papers, brushes, and smudges past and a new philosophy of cultural imperialism. Enyemak and artists like him had demonstrated, in thought and deed, the ascendance of modernism on the African continent...  

accompanied by a brief hurricane that structures a downturn and a dampness that flooded the Satin streets, sending people scampering for shelter. The spirits of the ancestors used to fly around decorated with green leaves, and the dance, the artist continues to live. This continuity is the theme of the serene and thoughtful Stille van die was rendered as a final tribute to a worthy son...  

...Tell me your goal and I'm not coming just Only when your hair grows to perfect whiteness Will I come...