

# Nigerian Art

Benin Bronzes and Beyond

# Kingdom of Benin



**Benin art** is the [art](#) from the [Kingdom of Benin](#) or [Edo Empire](#) (1440–1897), a pre-colonial African state located in what is now known as the Southern region of [Nigeria](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Primarily made of cast bronze and carved ivory, Benin art was produced mainly for the court of the [Oba of Benin](#) – a divine ruler for whom the craftsmen produced a range of ceremonially significant objects.<sup>[2]</sup> The full complexity of these works can be appreciated through the awareness and consideration of two complementary cultural perceptions of the art of Benin: the Western appreciation of them primarily as works of art, and their understanding in Benin as historical documents and as mnemonic devices to reconstruct history, or as ritual objects. This original significance is of great importance in Benin.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ph2D--ZeHQ> (gives a little history)

[https://www.worldhistory.org/Kingdom\\_of\\_Benin/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Kingdom_of_Benin/) (4 mins—benin bronzes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFbEU6pDIVw> (11 mins—return the bronzes)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJlkhMi\\_6PU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJlkhMi_6PU) (28 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOrzwBiXGkc> (bronze casting process)

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/horniman-museum-benin-bronzes-nigeria/index.html#:~:text=A%20London%20museum%20has%20agreed,in%20a%20news%20release%20Sunday.>

# Bronze vs. Brass

**Bronze** is an [alloy](#) consisting primarily of [copper](#), commonly with about 12–12.5% [tin](#) and often with the addition of other metals (such as [aluminium](#), [manganese](#), [nickel](#), or [zinc](#) and sometimes non-metals, such as [phosphorus](#), or [metalloids](#) such as [arsenic](#) or [silicon](#). These additions produce a range of alloys that may be harder than copper alone, or have other useful properties, such as [strength](#), [ductility](#), or [machinability](#).

**Brass** is an alloy of copper and zinc, in proportions which can be varied to achieve varying mechanical, electrical, and chemical properties. It is a substitutional alloy: atoms of the two constituents may replace each other within the same crystal structure.

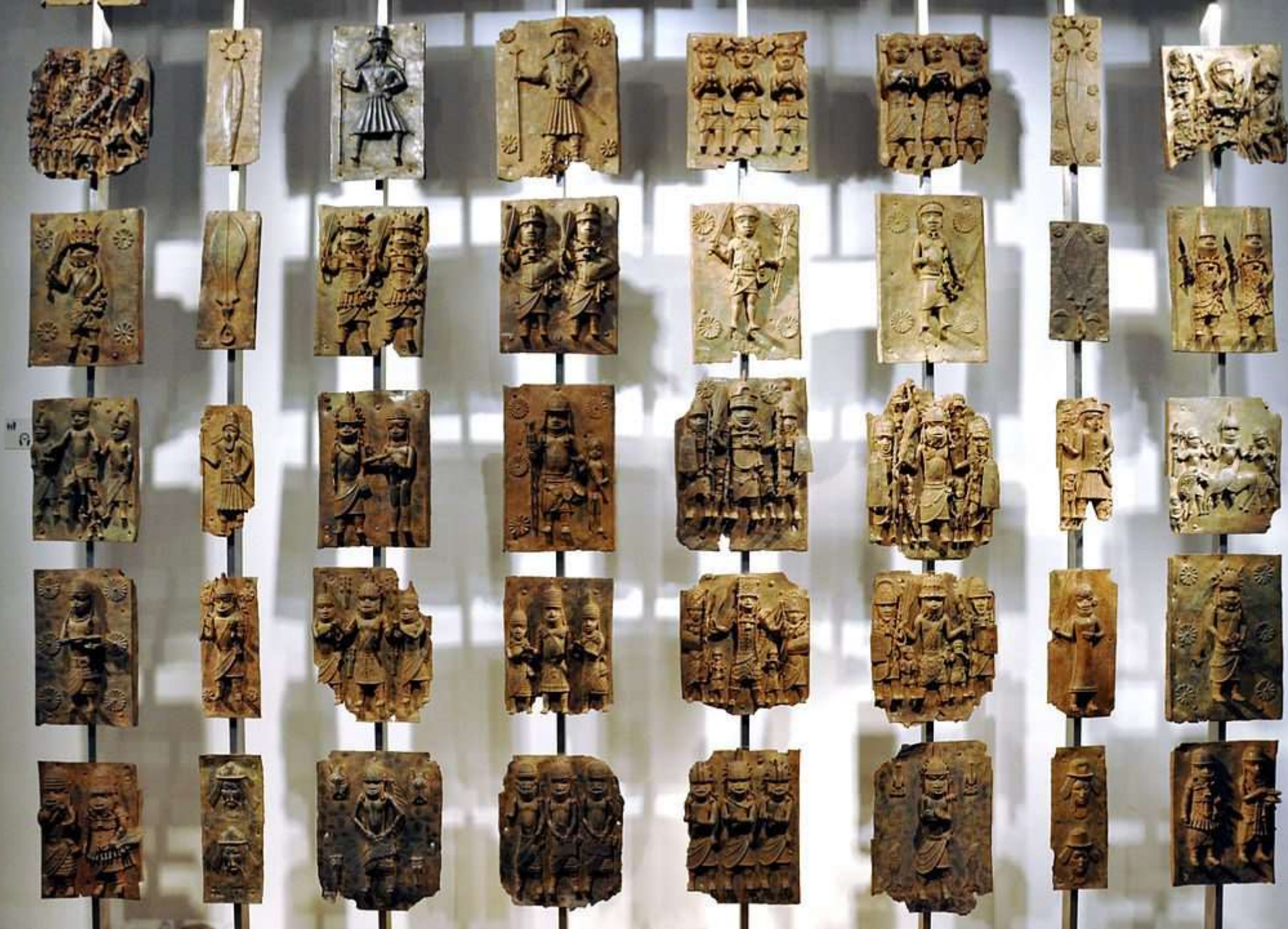
# What are the Benin Bronzes?

The 'Benin Bronzes' (made of brass and bronze) are a group of sculptures which include elaborately decorated cast plaques, commemorative heads, animal and human figures, items of royal regalia, and personal ornaments. They were created from at least the 16th century onwards in the West African Kingdom of Benin, by specialist guilds working for the royal court of the Oba (king) in Benin City. The Kingdom also supported guilds working in other materials such as ivory, leather, coral and wood, and the term 'Benin Bronzes' is sometimes used to refer to historic objects produced using these other materials.





















<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Q8cm4zkEmQ&t=247s>



































# Coral Beads

The Benin people are known for their red coral beads, which **decorate the necks of the royal family and brides during cultural events**. The origin of the coral beads date back to ancient Benin and hold uttermost significance to the fashion, lifestyle, culture and tradition of the tribe.

<https://anitaquansahlondon.com/blogs/latest-posts/the-significance-of-coral-in-edo-culture-nigeria>

<https://www.esanland.org/2019/10/the-oba-of-benin-kingdom-history-of.html>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZT51MsJm4g>









**Coral Beads: Its cultural importance  
among the **Benin** people**

©HarryChen















# Ife Kingdom

**Ife** is an ancient [Yoruba](#) city in south-western [Nigeria](#). The city is located in present-day [Osun State](#).<sup>[2]</sup> Ife is about 218 kilometers northeast of [Lagos](#)<sup>[3]</sup> with a population of 509,813, the highest in Osun State according to [population census](#) of 2006.

The Ife Empire was **the first empire in Yoruba history**. It was founded in what is now southwestern Nigeria and eastern Benin today. The Ife Empire lasted from 1200 to 1420. The empire was founded by Odùduwà and became well-known for its sophisticated art pieces.

According to the traditions of the [Yoruba religion](#), Ilé Ifè was founded by the order of the Supreme God [Olodumare](#) by [Obatala](#). It then fell into the hands of his brother [Oduduwa](#), which created enmity between the two.<sup>[4]</sup> [Oduduwa](#) created a dynasty there, and sons and daughters of this dynasty became rulers of many other kingdoms in Yorubaland.<sup>[5]</sup> The first Ooni of Ife is a descendant of Oduduwa, which was the 401st [Orisha](#). The present ruler since 2015 is Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi Ojaja II, [Ooni of Ife](#) who is also a Nigerian accountant.<sup>[6]</sup> Named as the city of 401 deities, Ife is home to many worshippers of these deities and is where they are routinely celebrated through festivals.<sup>[7]</sup>

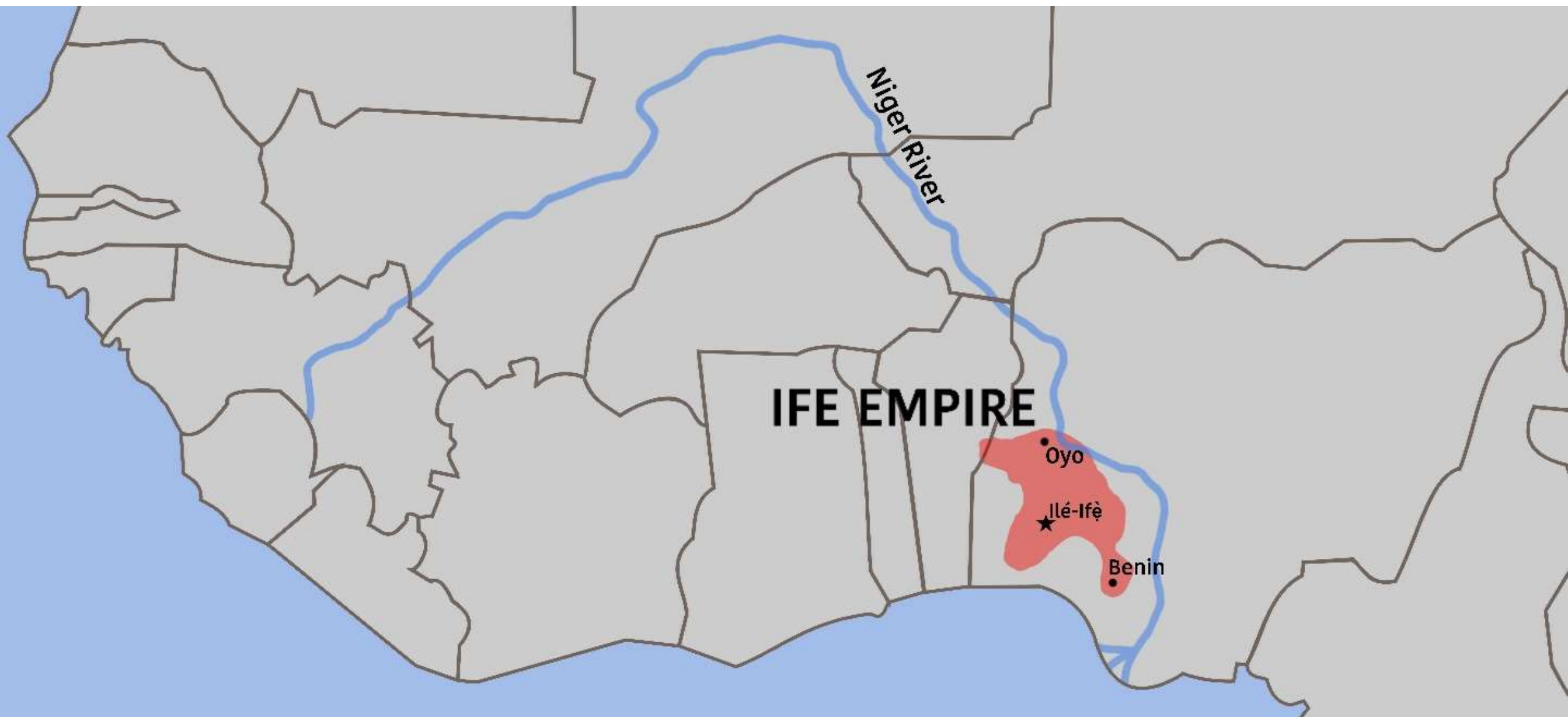
The Bronze Head from Ife, or Ife Head, is one of eighteen copper alloy sculptures that were unearthed in 1938 at Ife in Nigeria, the religious and former royal centre of the Yoruba people. It is believed to represent a king. It was probably made in the fourteenth-fifteenth century C.E.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbd4REmzzNU> (5 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI1XF-AcuHY> (9 mins)

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa0st\\_aMjmA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa0st_aMjmA) (15 mins)















Texturing and R













# Bruce Onobrakpeya

Bruce Obomeyoma Onobrakpeya is a Nigerian printmaker, painter and sculptor. He has exhibited at the Tate Modern in London, the National Museum of African Art of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and the Malmö Konsthall in Malmö, Sweden.

- <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2022/05/04/nigeria-artist-bruce-onobrakpeya-spc-intl.cnn>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG2MI71b4-Y> (printmaking, etc—use this)





























# Victor Ehikhamenor

Victor Ehikhamenor is a Nigerian visual artist, writer, and photographer known for his expansive works that engage with multinational cultural heritage and postcolonial socioeconomics of contemporary black lives.

<https://www.afrolifestyle.com/article/victor-ehikhamenor-innovative-contemporary-artist/> (7 mins—use this)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dytmgXWO\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dytmgXWO_U)















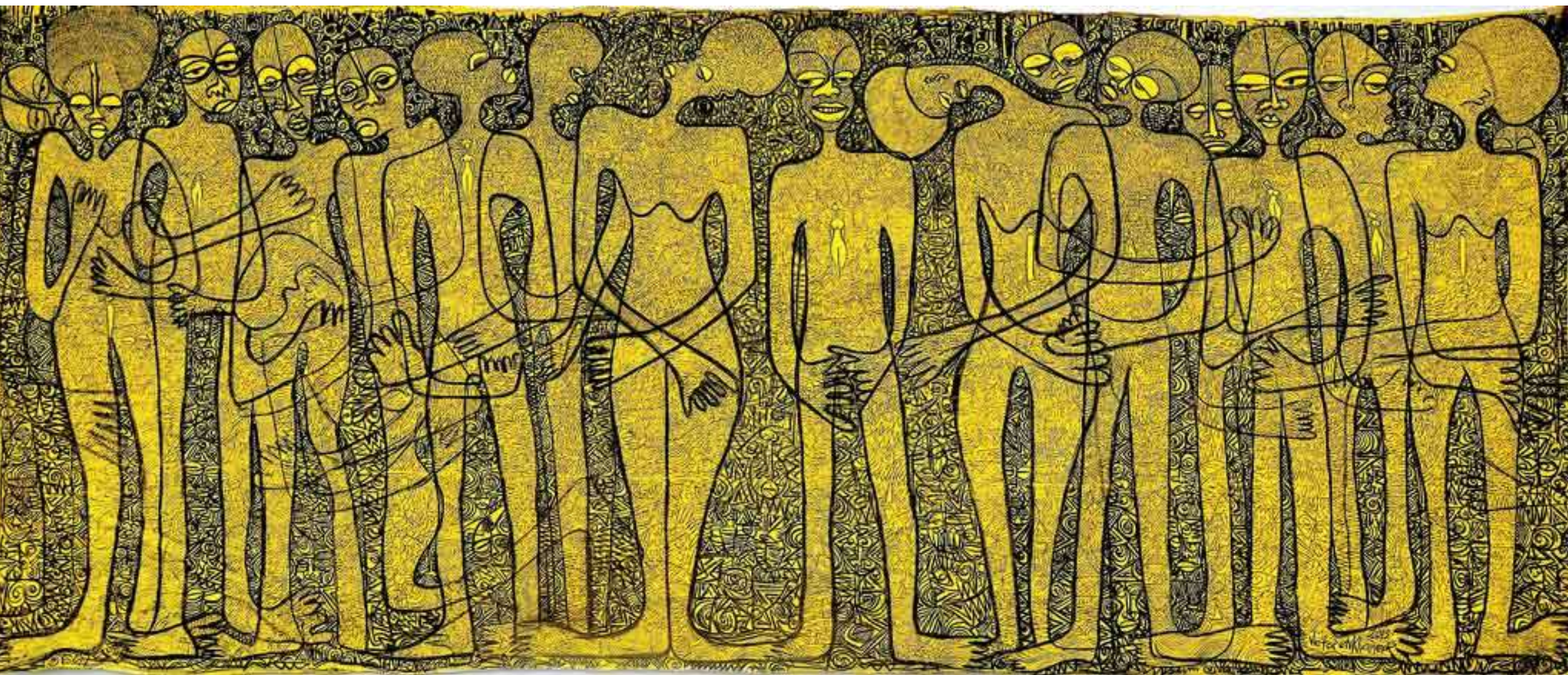


















# Nike Davies-Okundaye

Chief Nike Davies-Okundaye, also known as Nike Okundaye, Nike Twins Seven Seven and Nike Olaniyi, is a Nigerian batik and Adire textile designer.

<https://colorxstudios.com/editorials/mama-nike>



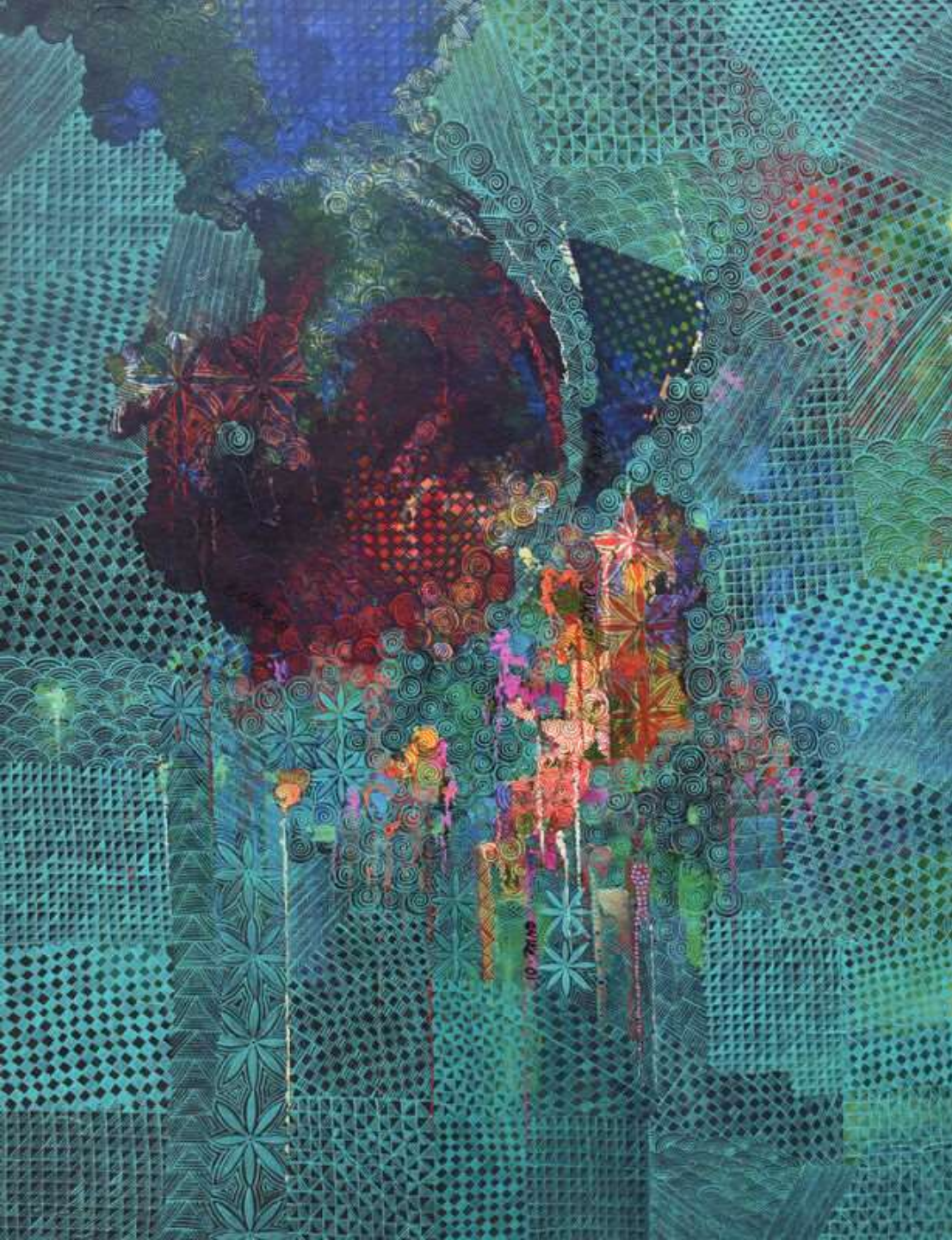




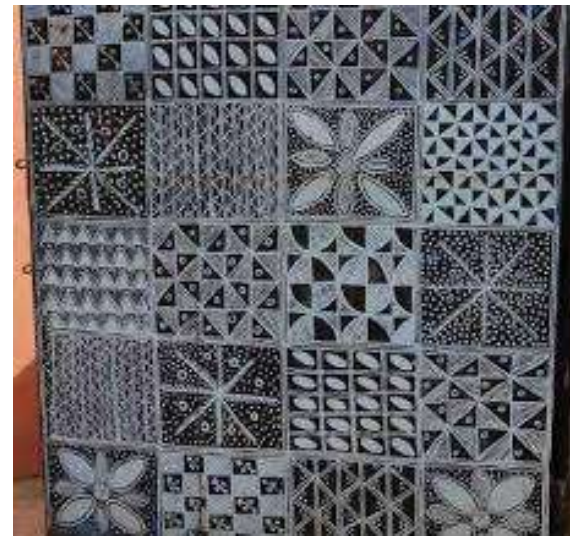














# Yinka Shonibare

Yinka Shonibare CBE, RA, is a British-Nigerian artist living in the United Kingdom. His work explores cultural identity, colonialism and post-colonialism within the contemporary context of globalization. A hallmark of his art is the brightly colored Ankara fabric he uses.

<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s5/yinka-shonibare-cbe-in-transformation-segment/>





























# Marcellina Akpojotor

In her vibrant, textural portraits, Marcellina Akpojotor combines scraps of traditional Nigerian fabric, such as ankara, with traditional materials including acrylics. Her sitters become patchwork collages, which Akpojotor places over flat pastel backgrounds (also executed in patchworked fabric) such as furniture, pets, and house plants. The Lagos-based artist studied at Lagos State Polytechnic, then interned under the Nigerian artist [Bruce Onobrakpeya](#) and participated in his Harmattan Workshop. She has exhibited in Lagos, Dubai, Johannesburg, and beyond. Identity and female empowerment are frequent themes in Akpojotor's work.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04i0ScpUm24>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0A-PCxdcvs>





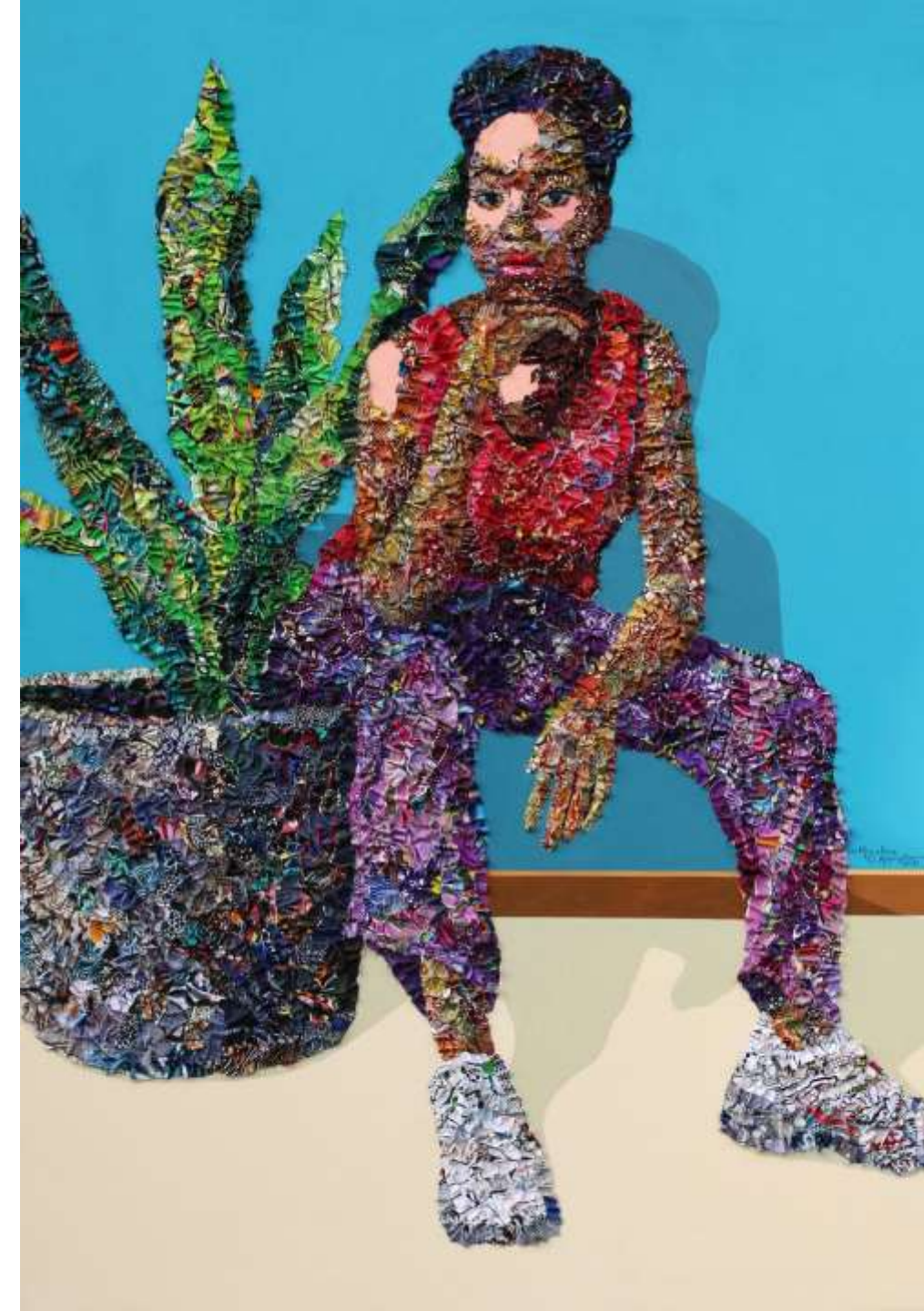






MaryEllen  
© 1998



















# Assignment Suggestions...

- Use fabric scraps in an artwork
- Use the color of red coral in an artwork
- Create a portrait bust
- Use vertical contour lines in an artwork
- Do an artwork inspired by the patterns in the Benin bronzes