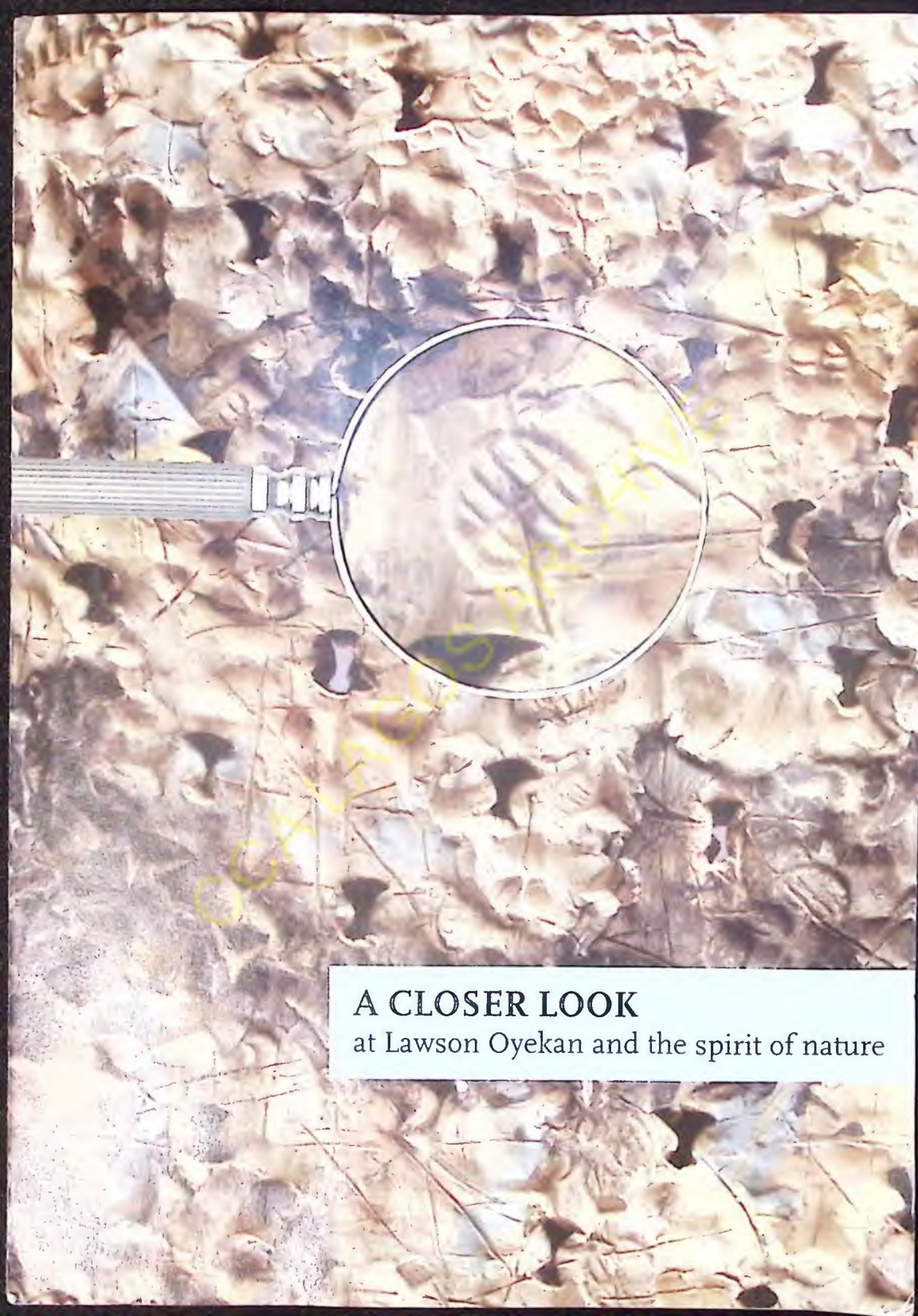




A CLOSER LOOK

at Lawson Oyekan and the spirit of nature

LAWSON OYEKAN

was born in London in 1961 and raised in Nigeria, a country in Western Africa. He studied art in England at the Central College of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art. Today, he lives in London and makes his sculptures at his studio in Denmark. He has traveled all around the world—to the United States, to Korea. His work is included in many museum and gallery collections.

Lawson Oyekan has been artist-in-residence in Baltimore at the Maryland Institute College of Art during the fall of 2004 and spring of 2005. While here, he created several new ceramic sculptures for the exhibition *Lawson Oyekan and the spirit of nature*.



The exhibition's title—*Lawson Oyekan and the spirit of nature*—came from something Lawson told the 33 MICA students who have been working on this exhibition since August. He said that the natural world, as he experiences it in his travels from country to country, has an important influence on the sculptures he creates.

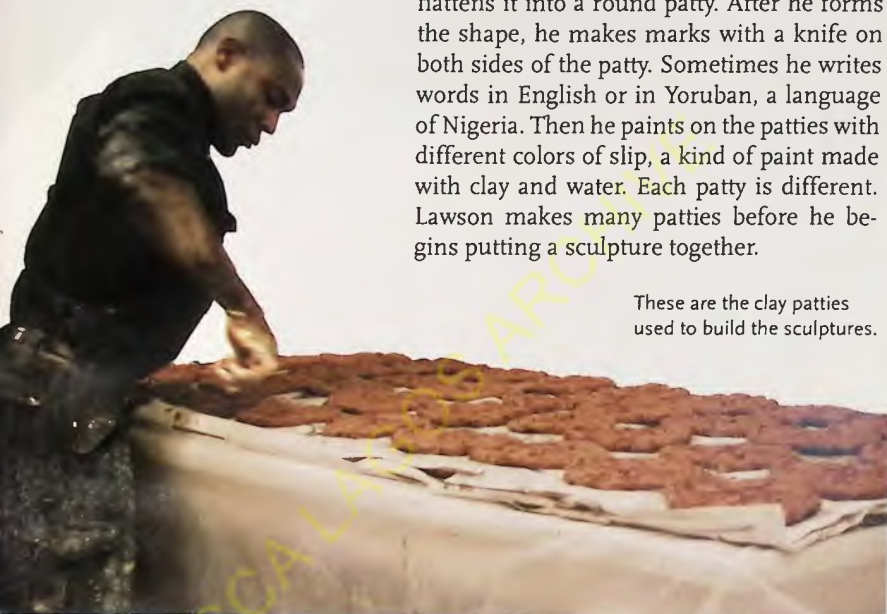
As you're looking at Lawson's sculptures, see if you can find details that might tell you a little of the story of Lawson Oyekan's travels and experiences in Baltimore. Each one of us experiences "the spirit of nature" as we travel around the world in which we live.

Check out the Lawson Oyekan website - www.mica.edu/lawson_oyekan

The Artistic Process

Lawson Oyekan dips his hand into a large bucket of clay and pulls out enough to fill his palms. He forms a ball, then carefully flattens it into a round patty. After he forms the shape, he makes marks with a knife on both sides of the patty. Sometimes he writes words in English or in Yoruban, a language of Nigeria. Then he paints on the patties with different colors of slip, a kind of paint made with clay and water. Each patty is different. Lawson makes many patties before he begins putting a sculpture together.

These are the clay patties used to build the sculptures.



Things to Do – Questions to Consider

Lawson makes sculptures that are the size and shape of people. Choose your favorite sculpture in the gallery. If it came to life, what do you think would it say to you? What would you say in response?

Some of the pieces in the show (shown at right) are objects the artist found in Baltimore! These are called "found object sculptures." Why do you think Lawson liked these specific objects? What do they have in common with the ceramic sculptures in the exhibition?



This piece is one of the Red Twins made at MICA.

The sculptures make music from the wind.

The patties are linked to make a skin.

In what other ways do Lawson's sculptures imitate nature?

How does the size of each vessel make you feel? Do you feel small when you stand next to one piece, large when you stand next to another?

Light flows through the holes in the surface of the sculptures.

Look for images of nature in Lawson's sculptures. Do you see animals and symbols?



Lawson's sculptural works are built by hand. He pinches, pulls, pushes, and measures as he attaches each patty. He creates a single sculpture out of many smaller pieces. The surfaces of the final sculptures include the marks he made and the words he wrote on the patties. He also uses a knife to make keyhole-like openings into the sculpture as it rises. When the sculpture is finished, you can look through these openings into a different world.

While he was artist-in-residence at Maryland Institute College of Art in the fall of 2004, Lawson invited the College's faculty, staff, and students to join him in the studio where he was creating the new sculptures you will see in this exhibition. Each person who came to the studio was able to create a patty, and those patties were added to some of Lawson's sculptures. Many people were able to help create these beautiful ceramic sculptures.



Lawson Oyekan working in his studio at MICA.

Lawson makes his sculptures permanent by "firing" them in a kiln. When mud dries, it crumbles and cracks. The same thing would happen to Lawson's ceramic sculptures if he left them alone after putting them together. Ceramic artists make their sculptures permanent by baking them—this is called "firing"—in a special, very hot oven called a kiln. Different types of kilns are used to fire different kinds of clay—at temperatures as low as 1000 degrees Fahrenheit and as high as 3400 degrees Fahrenheit (for comparison, when you bake a cake at home, your oven would be set at about 350 degrees Fahrenheit). What makes the clay sculpture permanent is a chemical reaction that takes place in the kiln. Water, carbon, and other organic materials are burned out of the clay. This causes it to shrink and become as hard as stone. This process is called vitrification. Did you know that with adult supervision, you could use your oven at home as a kiln to fire plastic clays?



Oyekan in front of the giant kiln he uses in Denmark.
Photo by Esben Lyngsaa Madsen

After you leave the gallery, you can make your own collection of "found objects." Find a small box. Decorate it to be your treasure chest. When you are walking in the woods or around your home, collect objects that you like. Put these objects into your box. As your collection grows, think about your treasures—what do the objects you've collected reveal about who you are?

Lawson's sculptures tell a lot about who he is as a person and as an artist. Whenever you make art, you're telling others about who you are too. You're making your own sculptures using clay or your collection of objects. Write a story. Paint a painting. Make a collage. Be creative. Be yourself.

Make a pinch pot



1. Take a lump of clay about the size of your hand and form it into a ball.
2. Find the center of the ball with your thumbs, and gently press in the center with your thumbs while at the same time turning the ball. Soon your ball will have a deep well with thick sides.
3. Continue this process, making the walls as tall and thin as you like. **You have made a pinch pot!**

Look at the surface of your pinch pot. Can you see your fingerprints on the inside and outside of the pot? This is texture. Think of other ways to make texture. Try using different found objects from your treasure hunt to make marks on and in your pot. Allow the spirit of nature to guide you in your making.