

Ayo Aina at Goethe-Institut Lagos

By inviting Ayo Aina, Goethe-Institut Lagos presents an outstanding artist from Zaria, in order to introduce his latest works to the public, the press and the vibrant artist community in Lagos.

Aina's works don't just depict reality, they don't follow a l'art pour l'art-concept, they are not 'human' in a vague and noncommittal way. They declare a position: They comment with sentiments, wit and humour on social, environmental and political issues. Aina's works stand out not only due to his creativity, but also due to his highest

artistic professionalism and exactness. Especially in his installations, he knows how to de-familiarize daily objects, how to recreate them, how to put them into a new and surprising context and suddenly they are the opposite of what they normally are to us. Thus, the globe turns into a dust-bin, an inviting dining table turns into a deadly trap, a toilet... better to see for yourself.

I wish you an irritating, enriching encounter with *Vestiges & Debris*.

Arne Schneider

Goethe-Institut Lagos, Director
Lagos, 11.02.06

Introducing Vestiges & Debris

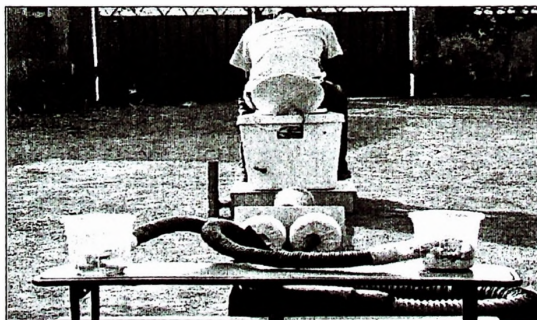
If we reflect on the artistic career of Ayo Aina born 1969 in Kano city, Nigeria, the exhibition *Vestiges & Debris* can be considered his third solo outing. In 1991 at Ijebu Ode where he did his National Service (N.Y.S.C.), he exhibited works of his first degree simply titled, *Works Of Ayo Aina*. In these works, essentially made up of paintings with the oil medium on canvas, the main focus of the subject matter was everyday life themes. Rendered

naturalistically the works reflect the tradition of the Zaria art school where some of the major characteristics of the painting school celebrate colour, and everyday life experience in our society. The approach to figures is often naturalistic expression, often with an impressionist mannerism. True to the Zaria art school nuance the works celebrate col-

our as a metaphor to goodness, resilience and defiant hope. The enigma here is that colour both celebrates life and at the same time criticises life's social problems.

In 2003 at Maison de France in Lagos, Aina presented another solo show under the title *Ainaesthetics*.

The show was made up of diverse works in oil again but this time several other materials like wires, fabric, electronic parts were used both as medium, surface, and image/motif. Colour played



the role of voicing the complexities of the mixed media. From this show three themes clearly came out: oppression, globalisation and Information Communication Technology, now popularly known as ICT.

From those two shows one can see clearly a path being charted by the artist. The first



show at Ijebu Ode in a sense registers the artist's desire to introduce himself to us in many ways. While the show itself introduced the artist, the works point to a deeper introduction of the artist as a member of a society who feels a sense of responsibility to comment on what happens to/in everyday life in his society. By so doing Aina place notice to all of us that he sees, watches and is obliged to comment on what we do everyday.

In *Ainaesthetics* Ayo Aina took a critical position of this everyday life made earlier. What he chose to focus on interestingly is the way we relate with one another in the complex world of dealing with the question of difference, the management of re-

sources and how in this whole process power, authority and responsibility which are the dynamics of human life is manipulated and abused to produce oppression instead of

equality. Globalisation expresses the artist's fear about what consequences the poor management of ourselves will do as this is made even more real with the internet (ICT) in a Third World society.

In this show, *Vestiges & Debris*, it becomes very clear that Ayo Aina continue from *Ainaesthetics* in an angry mood with our society. Having observed our everyday life ravaged by oppression in a world where the old village lives under the law of being your neighbor's keeper, the law of the new village becomes "survival of the fittest". Here "interest" now determines relationship in the new community. In this situation the result can only be *Vestiges & Debris*.

A close look at the meaning of the word

vestige frightened me. It is an eerie word that prophase doom, or looming danger. These are some of the phrases used in defining vestige in the New Webster's Dictionary of English Language (International edition 1995). Vestige is something that is "faintly visible, a faint evidence of what use to be" Vestige is also defined /described as "A TRACE"!! This is scary. It is one thing to long for the "good old days", at least this gives you the luxury and fantasy of romanticizing over good memories. But when we look at our situation and observe things in the gradual process of dying, disappearing, we are compelled to confront the present. And if the present is a progression of something degenerating as our society is now... We recall things like

HIV/AIDS. All around us we see young boys/girls whose lives are gradually ebbing away. A mother, father who are simply wasting away, a family, community slowly dying. A society in this progressive path



becomes ultimately *Vestiges & Debris*.

When one confronts Aina's work one can see that the debris of our society is partly a result of oppression. Waste, wastes and heaps of wastes perhaps is the richest form of development (decadent development) that we can witness around us today. It shows a society whose economy is driven by the productive machine of consumption without production. The consumption industry process shit, waste or what Aina prefers to call debris. These are the new products of oppression, globalization and ICT in the Third World. Okay, the issues may not be new, the angst too may not be new but what Aina's work present to us in vivid imagery is the awesomeness of this destruction. Take "**Hard Lessons**" for ex-

ample; this is an installation of a classroom setting where dwarfed uncomfortable classroom chairs face a distorted chalkboard. In a sense this summarizes the comical state of education in the country. The colourful jotters on the writing board speak familiar tunes of colourful but empty policies/promises always made on the news media and budget sheets. Such policies and promises are captured in colourful words like "in the pipeline ... , cushioning hardship" etc. The use of such phrases has led to the vanderlisation of huge petroleum pipelines. Recently for a friend told me That because of the use of the phrase, "... cushioning the people's suffering," he has come to suspect and hate cushions.

In the work "**Victims**" we are forced by Aina to see that the game played by rulers on their citizens, at the end of the day, and between the rulers and citizens make both become victims of their actions and inactions. The natural laws play out perfectly here confounding both the victor and the vanquished. But Aina chooses very vulnerable motifs to represent this to us. On a white "embalmed" bed in "**Victims**" the legs of children protrude from a white hospital bed, stick-like, cold and lifeless. From above the knees of these feet their bodies appear to have decomposed or melted to untraceable debris. In this most unsettling work everything is white, pure- almost innocent. "**Free Lunch**," another work, is made of traps with eggs on them. This is a dinner setting or a garden meal. It is an invitation to a meal that is not, by the content of the plate, with dare consequences. "**Free**

Lunch" reference Aina's earlier work "**Dinner Time**" in which stainless dishes are used in an installation where the meal is of nails and the seats of the chairs cushioned with nails. Choosing the subject of a meal Aina raises for us several issues about hunger, the "National cake," survival, greed etc.

Perhaps it is only one work "**The Path to Glory**" alone that represent a light in the dark tunnel of *Vestiges and Debris*. Otherwise, all the other works are not for the faint hearted. But life in Nigeria is no longer

for the faint-hearted. That is why we have so many "**Victims**", so many "**Free Lunches**"

Come February when these work will be shown, Ayo Aina will perhaps be the first artist in Nigeria who will be showing this number of works in installations and using unfamiliar provocative formats. He will be setting the pace for critical discourse in contemporary Nigerian art in the ongoing debate of Nigerian's response to conceptual art seen in the West's mega shows.

The show will also have

far-reaching implication for the spaces that exists today in Nigeria for the display of art. Art collectors and sponsors will hold their drinks for a long time unable to consume these rather unfamiliar works. They will grapple with works that are not "collectable," works that do not move market. *Vestiges & Debris* will challenge the way art historians, critics and journalist review works like Aina's. At the end of the day what we cannot shy away from is the way Aina used very familiar objects, ideas and images that we all know to address issues that puzzles our



ciple of sowing and reaping... they are resultant effect of activity and inactivity... Choosing from a very wide range of materials, I try to create my art in a similar unifying form. No matter what material I use they are embalmed for preservation; the significance of each material used is in the intended statement."

Vestiges & Debris for me is a challenge to us about the way we see art and life, the role art impact on life, and whether or not we are ready to sponsor art for life or art for fun.

Jerry Buhari

Senior lecturer, Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Vestiges & Debris – Artist's Statement

Vestiges & Debris is a story of gross neglect and wanton disregard for man by man, and for the earth by man.

Man has Dumped Man
Man has Dumped the Earth
Man has Dumped on the Earth
All kinds of Rubbish

Man has subdued but not replenished the earth. In *Vestiges & Debris*, Man and the Earth confront Man. Man receives a "protest letter" from his estranged darling-the Earth. The earth serves man a reminder in the form of a beautiful "letter". This is done in the form of heaps of refuse that man has consistently dumped on her. In a sense these

heaps of waste represent a complain about man's disregard for the earth's welfare. Thus, *Vestiges & Debris* is a body of work which comments humorously and critically on environmental issues.

My art employ the metaphor of a processing or manufacturing machine to drive home the reality of the principle of sowing and reaping, where input determines output, and raw material determines end-product. This is most vividly expressed in my *New Improved*

A69SS Shit Recycler. This satirical installation campaigns for a recycling culture as part of the solution to environmental management. This is done by demonstrating humorously a process whereby shit can be recycled to produce a sumptuous meal. The irony also is that it chronicles the nature of recycled leadership that permeates the African political climate, where leaders take their country for a ride. In this type of leadership, corruption and mediocrity are celebrated virtues, and

citizens are constantly fed with shit in the name of a sumptuous meal. My installations originate from a constant urge to stretch the explorative limit of the 2-D surface. For me the 2-D can no

longer express adequately the excessive pile of environmental mess and the ubiquity of our political debris.

Vestiges & Debris is a meal that I have prepared for you. You are welcome to the table.

Ayo Aina





GOETHE-INSTITUT
LAGOS

Ayo Aina – Vestiges & Debris

Feb 11 – Feb 24, 2006

- 1 Rat Race
- 2 Man and His Environment
- 3 The Path to Glory
- 4 The Greenhouse Effect
- 5 Hard Lessons
- 6 Text and Illustration
- 7 Man Everywhere Bruised
- 8 Surrogate Mothers
- 9 Vestiges & Debris
- 10 Holocaust
- 11 Victims
- 12 Strident Voices
- 13 Last Vestiges
- 14 EFCC
- 15 Global Warming
- 16 New Improved A69SS Shit Recycler
- 17 They Suffer for Lack of Knowledge
- 18 Free Lunch