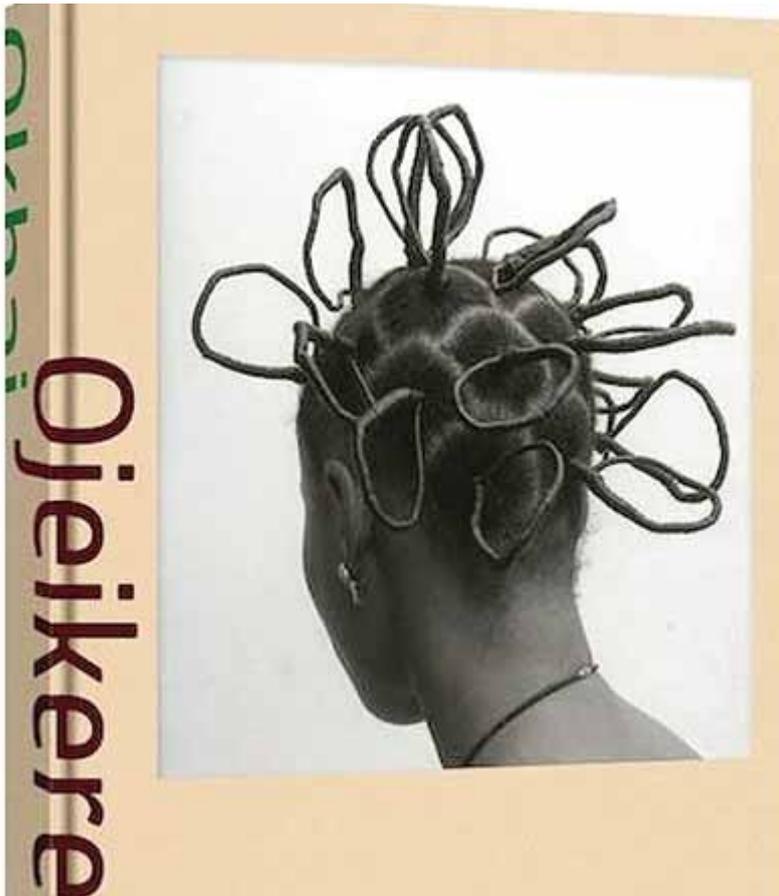


# THE GUARDIAN

## Documenting Mastery Of Photographer, Ojeikere

By Tajudeen Sowole on November 1, 2015 12:10 am



When a new book simply titled J D Okhai Ojeikere, edited by Bisi Silva was launched recently at Metropolitan Club, Victoria Island, Lagos, masterly skill of the late photographer was celebrated. Ojeikere (1930 – 2013) died as one of the foremost African photographers whose work was widely revered across the world.

Reviewing the book before a modest audience attendance, renowned photographer, Tam Fiofori who has a personal experience to share about Ojeikere could not but inject some revelations into his presentation. Also, Sandra Mbanefo-Obiago who gave a Remark at the launch described the book as setting “the stage for us to fully appreciate the importance of Pa Ojeikere’s contribution to global art.”

Fiofori started his review by recalling the gradual assimilation of Nigerian photography into Silva’s curatorial adventure. Also, in what the reviewer described as a digression, he revisited how his colleagues Jide Adeniyi-Jones and Don Barber lured Ojeikere into becoming the

pioneer president of Photographers Association of Nigeria (PAN) at the time other senior professionals of the period declined the offer.

**And just when one was questioning the relevance of his digression, Fiofori briefly took the audience back to the journey of the first book published on Ojeikere. Fiofori highlighted how he linked the author of the book, Andre Magnin and Ojeikere. Noting that Silva's work on Ojeikere has come 15 years after that of Magnin, the reviewer argued that both authors "have been responsible for this trajectory of exposure, which has culminated in well-deserved world fame for Ojeikere and his body of work."**

Published by Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Lagos – a space founded by Silva – the 304 pages book, according to Fiofori, include a Foreword by Silva titled Introduction, Framing the Moment by Aura. Seikkula and Silva; Shooting Stars: From the WCA to Lagos Island by Erin Haney; Ojeikere and the Architecture of Photography by Ikem Stanley Okoye; and sections of specific images on Architecture, Headgear, Hairstyles, Portraits and People.

Also featured among the essays are Turning Heads Process and Production in Ojeikere's Hairstyles by Antwan I. Byrd; Sites and Lives: J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's Portraits of Modernity by Bisi Silva; and J.D. Okhai Ojeikere in conversation with photographers Don Barber and Jide Adeniyi-Jones.

Describing the publication as "a leisurely coffee-table book, Fiofori suggested that it expands the "format of the photo album, which conveniently serves the age-old tradition of entertaining visitors." He however added that the book is a good resource for artists, scholars and the general public

Highlighted in the book, according to Fiofori is the relationship between CCA and the late legendary photographer, which started in 2009 and led to quite a number of exhibitions.

Citing a section of the book that features critique on the work of Ojeikere, Fiofori revisited the contentious definition of what makes modern or contemporary content, particularly in the context of African photography. His grouse: "they are pre-occupied like European art critics and Historians and their Nigerian counterparts in the Diaspora with definition of contemporary and modern art and where to fit Ojeikere's work within these definitions." Fiofori stressed his disagreement about some "criticism jargons" which suggest that "words must overwhelm images."

However, the reviewer singled out the interview by Adeniyi-Jones and Barber as his choice of "the most interesting chapter of the book."

Chair of the launch, Gbenga Oyeboye who is the Managing Partner, Aluko & Oyeboye saw the book as a celebration of Ojeikere and "what he stands for." He noted that "Bisi has captured his passion and idea."

Mbanefo-Obiango's Remark, which appeared like another review of the book also placed the author and the subject in a coalesced creative relationship. She noted that "Bisi has presented Ojeikere's phenomenal works by buttressing them with essays that illuminate why this archive is so important."

If anyone thought the book is populated by familiar hairstyle pictures, which were taken by Ojeikere over the decades, Mbanefo-Obiango disclosed that quite some images selected by Silva were less seen in the public. "Bisi explains how she has chosen images from his famous hairstyle series, but through this project, would like to illuminate his lesser known works

which include the portraits he took in his village, Ovbiomu-Emai in Delta State, at the very beginning of his career in the 1950s followed by photographs he took in the heady days of hyper culture and nationalism at the University of Ibadan from 1954 – after the University had been established as the first in Africa in 1948. Bisi describes what we see in these amazing university student images:”

Sharing her thoughts on the making of the book, Silva challenges historians who have left out Ojeikere among “fathers of African photographers.” In fact she argued that “Ojeikere is a master in African photography.” Silva added that throughout his career, “Ojeikere presented Nigeria in dignity.”

One of Ojeikere’s sons, Amaize who gave the closing remarks and vote of thanks described the his father as patriarch whose quality “inspired his children.”

<http://www.ngrguardiannews.com/2015/11/documenting-mastery-of-photographer-ojeikere/>