

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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# AGBO FOLARIN AT WISCONSIN

Agbo Folarin traces his finger over a large sketch in his office, explaining each pen stroke as if it were a chapter in a book.

Like a master storyteller, he describes the meaning behind the figures in his drawing: Adam and Eve, the water jar boy, the Raven, Hades. As he finishes, he looks at his visitor for signs of comprehension, then lets out a booming, robust laugh that echoes down the hall.

With his broad smile and warm demeanour, the internationally known Nigerian artist and sculptor is a noticeable addition to the campus this spring. The drawing is part of his latest work - a 24-by-16 foot per relief sculpture being done for UW-Parkside as part of an exchange agreement with Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Folarin's **Diversity of Creation Myths** sculpture, being carefully hammered into thin copper sheets symbolises a rich diversity of cultures and how they have looked at the world.

the story into metal.

While the cacophony of tapping and pound-



In the upper left corner is the Christian story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. At the bottom left is Folarin's image of a small child symbolising hope for the future.

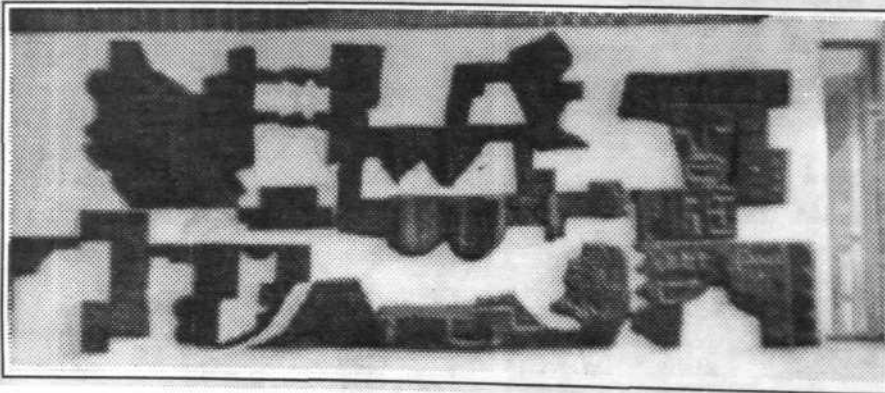
In-between is a wealth of creation images from different times and different cultures. There is the American Indian story of the Raven who brought life to the Earth. In the centre is the Egyptian story of the separation of earth and sky

Other images include the Greek sun god Helios; the god of the underworld, Hades; Poseidon the sea god; a Chinese dragon; the Chinese life forces, yin and yang; and Obatala the Yoruba (Nigerian) creation god.

Folarin's works have been exhibited around the world. His glass mosaic **Spirit of Man in Flight** graces the international airport terminal in Lagos Nigeria and many of his other works hang in public places in Nigeria. He had a theatre design exhibition at the 1972 Olympics in Munich Germany.

For Folarin, the exchange programme is an opportunity to work and learn with American artists and work with UW-Parkside students as 'colleagues in learning.'

'We need people with a different orientation of thinking; an international idea of cohesion and oneness.'



He researched meticulously for the specially commissioned work being crafted with the help of a group of UW-Parkside art students.

In a large engineering laboratory in Molinaro Hall, Folarin kneels on expansive sheets of copper, carefully sketching his images. All around him, students tap the copper with hand-made tools, permanently embedding

ing goes on around him, Folarin stands up and ponders the work like he doesn't hear a thing. When he works on the sculpture, it's almost as if he's in another world.

While the work reflects different mythological perspectives, it also expresses a hope for unity and oneness, he said.

he said.

Folarin said he will be proud when his copper sculpture is hung at the University later this year.

'Once it leaves my hand, it is public property. I like it that way. I want people to enjoy it.'

The exchange agreement between UW-Parkside and Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, is being funded by both institutions and the U.S. Information Agency.

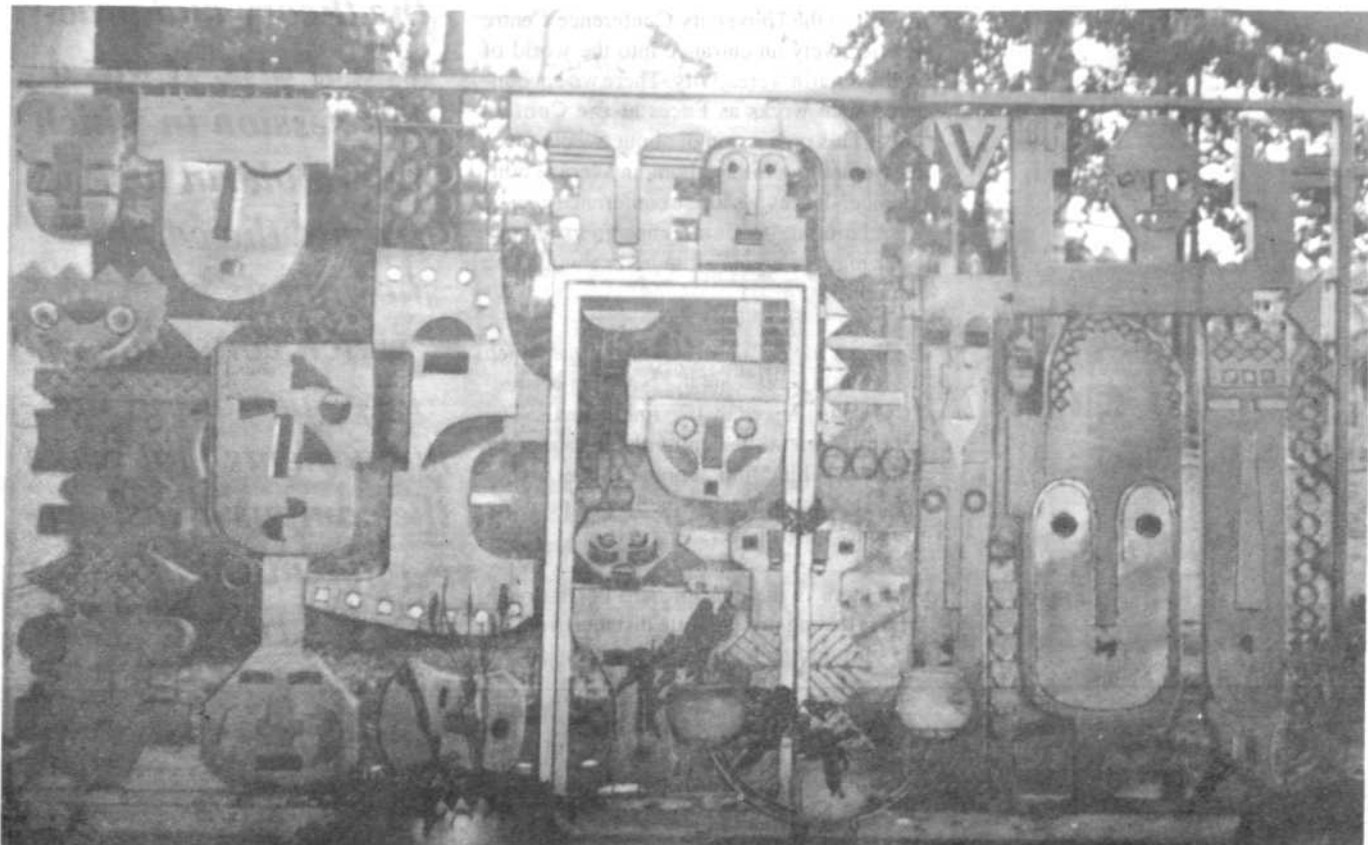
The programme was established through the connections of Lillian Traeger, professor of anthropology who has researched in Nigeria for years and travelled extensively in the

country.

Obafemi Awolowo University, a 25,000-student campus on the western edge of Nigeria, is situated on a large parcel between a rain forest and a savannah. Agbo Folarin is the second Nigerian faculty member to visit UW-Parkside. No UW-Parkside faculty have taken part in the exchange yet but several

have expressed interest. Traeger said the exchange will have benefits for faculty and students.

'They have a highly qualified set of faculty,' she said. The exchange gives students exposure to different perspectives and benefits the University 'just in terms of expanding our knowledge.' **GR**



## BACK IN IFE: THE SCULPTOR - STORY-TELLER BACK AT HIS BASE.

TAI ADE FATO

The campus of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife is well regarded among Africa's most beautiful campuses. It derives its beauty not only from the serene driveway that ushers the visitor through a distance of about two kilometres from the gate to the main campus. The buildings still stand as masterpieces of modern architectural design. Above all, there are the sculptural works and murals found all over the campus which make a statement about the tastes of the founding fathers of this monumental community.

We drove into the campus on a sunny day, late for our appointment with Agbo Folarin. The appointment had been booked by Lillian Traeger, a lecturer from the University of Wisconsin - Parkside.

We had to pay a price for coming late, thanks to a flat tyre in the course of the Lagos-Ife trip. After a long wait, we finally located him; it was as if he was the one that had been late for the appointment. He fussed over us, sympathising with us over the journey's slight misfortune.

Then Agbo Folarin insisted we must have something to eat. The pounded yam at the *buka* (bamboo-shed restaurant) just behind the Fine and Applied Arts Department building was a finger-licking affair. Then we got down to business.

This was not to be another long session of interview discussing the theory and practice of arts. It was a tour session in which Agbo Folarin took us round the campus showing us

his works which constitute a large portion of the monuments that make the campus a vast permanent exhibition ground.

The first was in 1973. It is a metal mural in front of the Students' Union Building. It is a melange of themes, a trend we were to find in a lot of Agbo Folarin's works. The mural is about protest, which symbolises students' unionism. As Agbo Folarin put it, 'Unionism is always about protesting about treatment of students by the government or by the university authorities.'

There are representations of different sports. The building also houses the administrative offices of the sports complex of the university. There are the footballer, the netballer, weight-lifter and people in different forms of