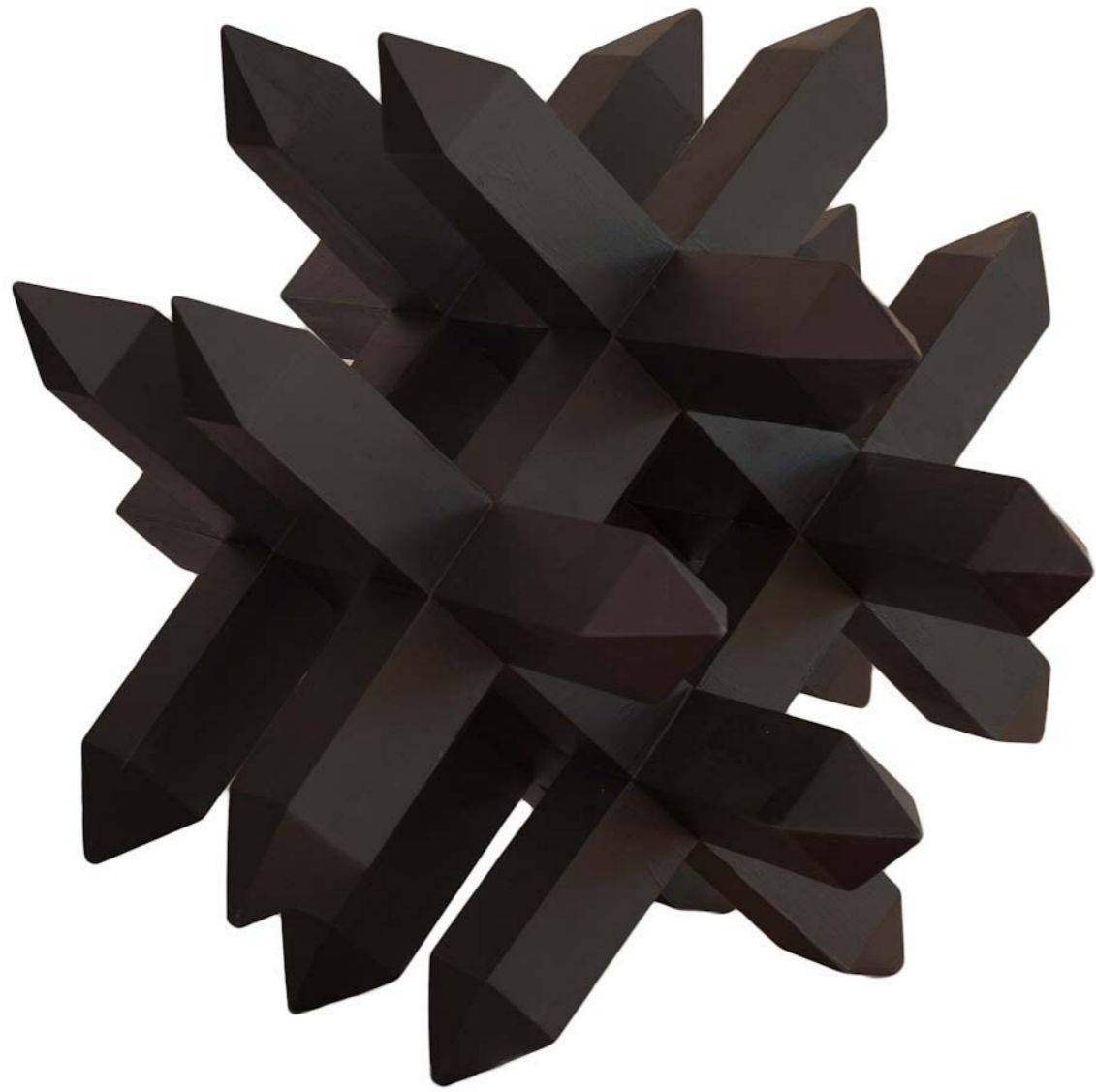
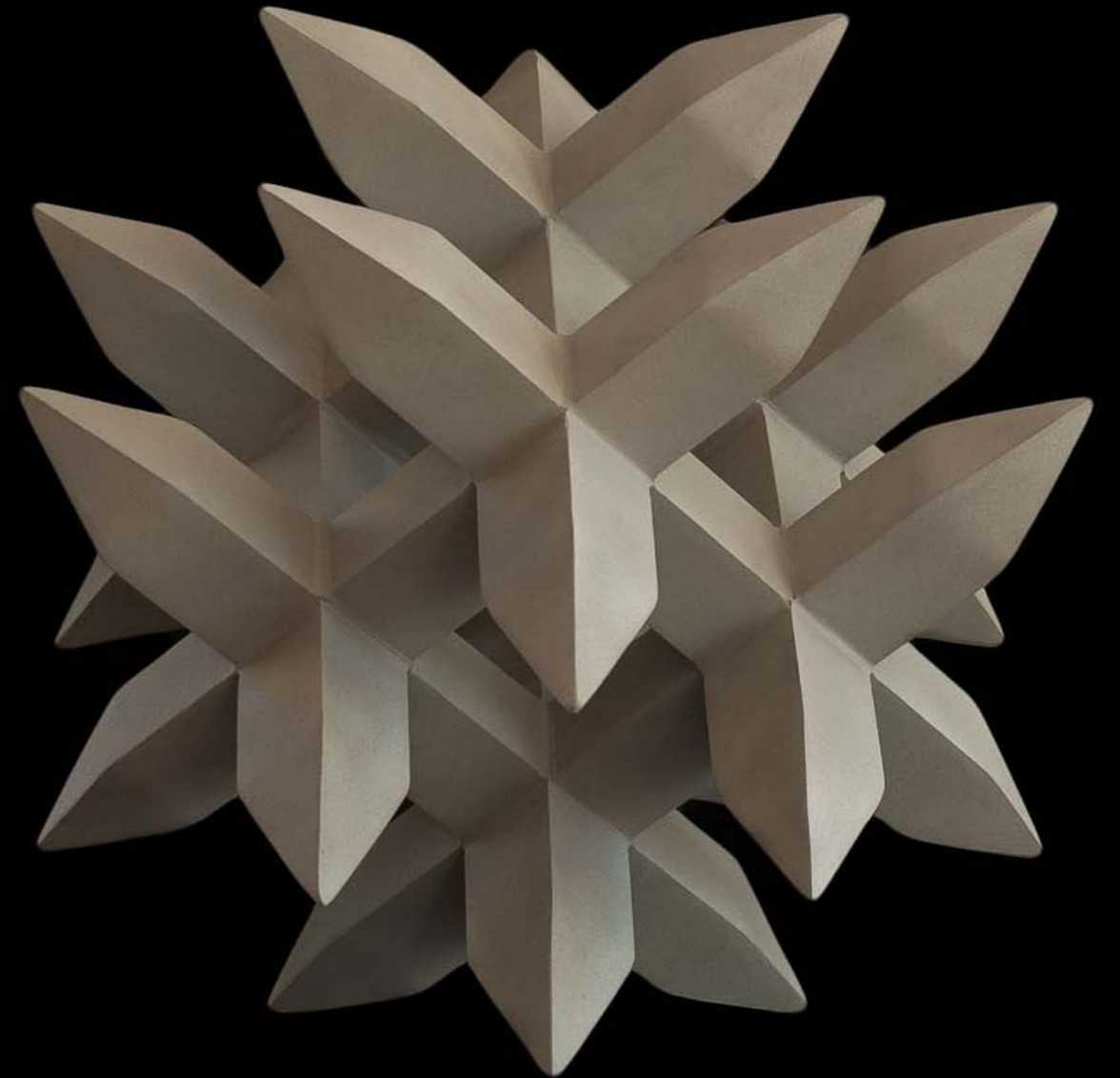
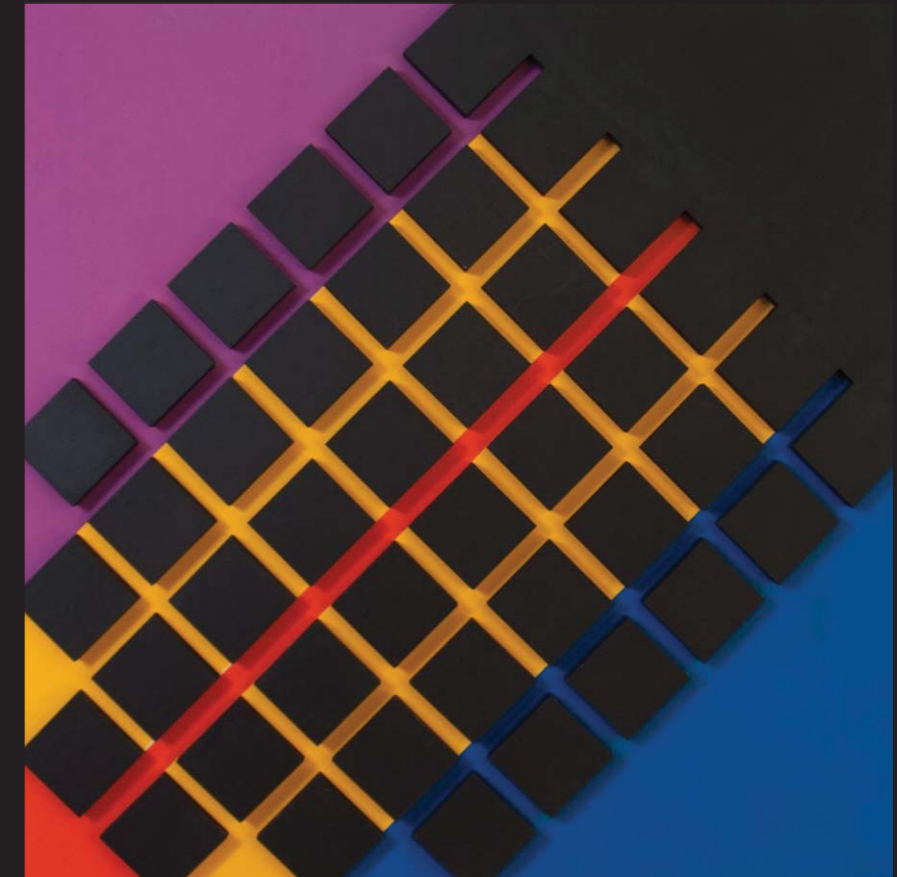


BILLY OMABEGHO



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Solar Series 1 - 2012 Painted Wood 36" x 36"

Recent Sculptures  
by  
Billy Omabegho

May, 13, 2012  
Lagos, Nigeria



“The art of Nigeria today is the modernistic steel sculpture of Billy Omabegho, which would look at home in Lincoln Center.”

John Darnton  
New York Times

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Ladder of Dreams - 2011, Wood-48"h.x12"w.

# Introduction

Billy Omabegho, creator of the monumental sculpture, "Zuma," symbol of the Nigerian Mission to the United Nations in New York City, is probably the foremost modern sculptor of Nigeria.

Born in Nigeria in 1944, from an early age, Omabegho expressed himself in three dimensional forms. He later sought formal art training in the United States where contact with the latest technical resources was possible. He studied at Cornell University and New York University.

Upon returning to Nigeria, Omabegho was able to apply new media and technical information to the wealth of African symbols from his cultural heritage. The Nigerian government commissioned him to create a number of major works including the towering sculpture memorial to the Late Head of State, Murtala Ramat Muhammed in Benin City, and the Lagos International Trade Fair Symbol.

Omabegho is acknowledged as the first Nigerian sculptor to design and execute modern large scale monumental works for strategic public places in Nigeria. He was also commissioned to do the only sculpture in the garden of the State House, Marina, Lagos.

The artist has shown in London, Brazil, New York, Washington D.C. as well as at the Nigerian Museum in Lagos. Along with being represented in many international private collections, he has also been commissioned to do large scale environmental sculpture in the United States. His 21 foot Corten Steel sculpture is prominently placed in front of Council House, the International Conference Center of the S.C. Johnson Company, Racine, Wisconsin.

Two of his designs were featured in the Global Africa Project, a major exhibition at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York from Nov. 2010 to May 2011.

As a Nigerian artist, Billy Omabegho incorporates the essence of classic Nigerian form in a universal contemporary idiom.

Although Omabegho's vision appears to be abstract, his philosophy rests on the beauty of geometric elements combined with the evocations of natural form. The result is full of the power of successful spatial and sculptural relationships.

Billy Omabegho's work, that of an artist born in Nigeria and trained in the United States incorporates the aura and essence of African symbols in the purity of modern forms and thus represents a synthesis of the historical past and the technological advancement of man.

The recent sculptures are a continuation of concepts that have been the focus of his art for many years.





Small Intrepid - 2012, White Metal 6.5"

# Curators' Statement

Billy Omabegho, internationally celebrated contemporary artist, has returned home to Nigeria with an exciting new exhibition of recent modern minimalist sculptures.

Omabegho, who is a respected visual artist, furniture designer, architect, and contemporary sculptor, is exhibiting an impressive new body of aluminium, stainless steel, wood & bronze forms, after many years working in his New York studio.

Omabegho's best known Nigerian sculptures were created during Nigeria's FESTAC years in the 1970's, when the government's vibrant commitment to art in public spaces led to important commissions such as his Convergence monument at the Lagos State House on the Marina (1976), the Memorial to Mohammed installed in Benin City (1977), the Manila symbol monument at the Lagos International Trade Fair (1978), and the Communication sculpture at the NET Building Marina (1979).

His 30 foot high, "zig zag" formed, welded aluminium and stainless steel Zuma sculpture, is one his most important works, representing the vital forces of nature which he translated into abstract forms representing birth and renewal. The sculpture was commissioned as an installation for the plaza in front of Nigeria House in Manhattan, New York. Zuma became one of the prized monuments of New York, showcasing Nigerian contemporary art in the heart of the city.

In 2005, leading Nigerian artists under the auspices of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) and the media advocacy group, Communicating for Change, mounted a successful campaign against a move to have the Zuma sculpture replaced with a more "African" looking sculpture.

"Billy", as he is fondly called by friends and associates, is a quintessential renaissance African, combining his deep rooted Ishekiri origins with a lively and broad based approach to African influences on global art and civilization. His writing and research on the origins of African art, is reflected in the ancient and pure forms of his bronze, aluminum, polished stainless steel and metal sculptures, which are made up of ultra-modern abstract forms, geometric shapes and strong diagonal influences.

His new works include the Homage series, in which he presents multilayered metal discs and triangular shapes to show mans' interconnectedness with the universe. The series also has minimalist triangular shapes in the form of the ancient Ka symbol, revealing the human form in devotional stance with outstretched arms, embracing the very essence of life. His signature sculpture called An Exploring Mind, beautifully represents Billy's deep connection with exploring science and nature, and the need for our minds to reach out and seek knowledge.

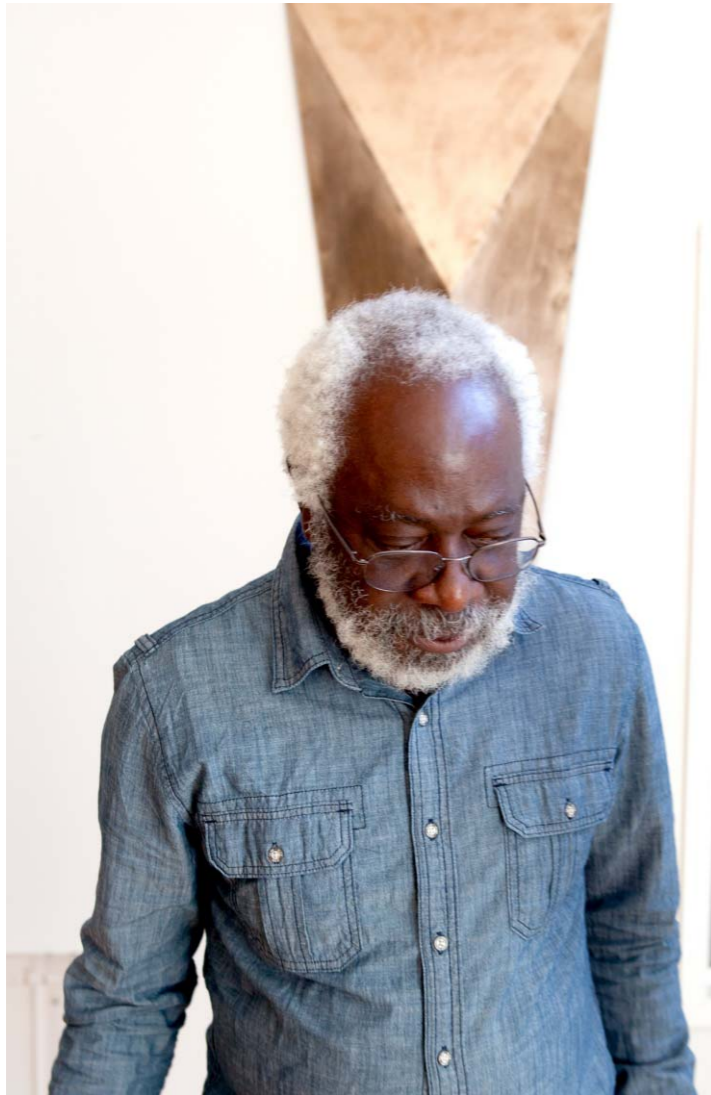
Omabegho is a master at combining highly technological influences and art processes on metal which represent pure ancient African symbols. His beautifully crafted, simple forms are truly unique representations of contemporary sculpture at its best.

After many years abroad, we are honored that Billy Omabegho is returning home on a nostalgic journey to his native Nigeria, to share his vision and exciting new collection with our dynamic & vigorously creative art community.

Sandra Mbanefo Obiogo  
Curator

Lagos, May 2012

# Artist Statement



I am a product of modern times and traditional Africa and so utilize technological development in my art work while at the same time I am influenced by my background.

I started working with wood and bronze and steel sheets, cut and Tig welded. My forms were influenced by the minimal art of the 60's and 70's, which I related to the geometric art forms found in African Art. I was not interested in stylized human figures or figurative art in general.

I have always been fascinated by the traditional symbols of natural phenomena so skillfully carved into the wooden stools of Bida and the Ifa trays of the Yoruba people of Nigeria: the zigzag lines, spirals, grids, radial patterns, slanted parallel lines and more. Translated into a modern idiom, they appear in my work, still symbolizing forces of nature, water, sun, life, death, rebirth and creation.

I am now venturing into the realm of color, powerfully juxtaposed against black. The new works have a startling visual impact and unusual power. The form of these vibrant bas-reliefs is influenced by the first known depiction of what may be sunrise and sunset in graphic form.

Man cannot create in a vacuum; the artist needs knowledge, not only of the techniques of his profession, but also of his environment and the history of the world. The African symbols that appear in my work, the snake, the H shape and the triangle, embody the ancients' understanding of the processes of evolution.

Throughout prehistoric African rock paintings, the pharaonic period as well as in subsequent African art, the Ka symbol or H-shaped form with arms held aloft, frequently appears combined with a triangular gesture in which either arms or legs are positioned at angles instead of parallel. The triangle has always been used to explain the cosmology of the universe.

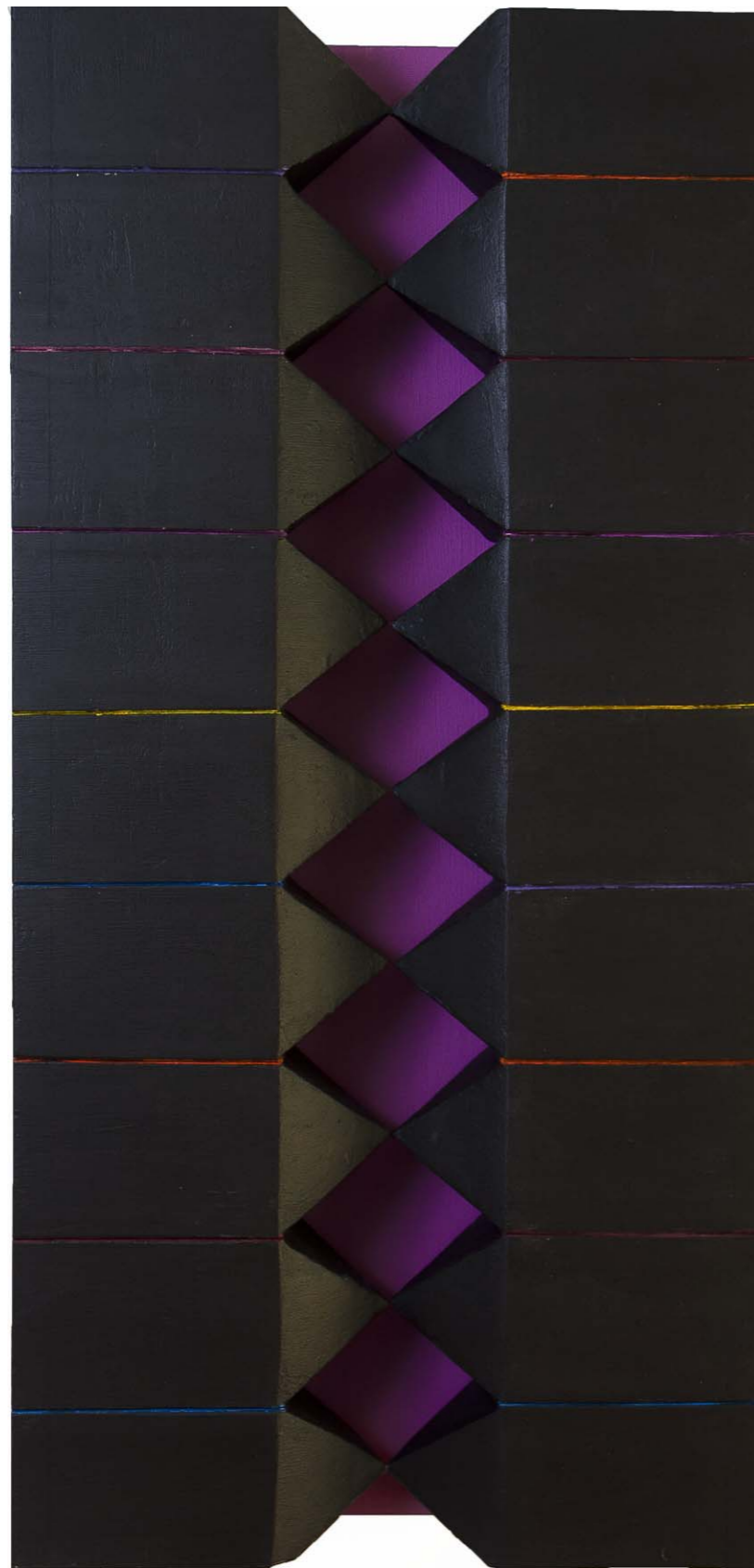
What is the concept behind my work that society can glean from? The importance of art goes beyond artists, critics, collectors, and investors. It is the impact on the society of all creativity and glorifies the emergence of the creative mind of mankind from earliest times.

Billy Omabegho  
Lagos, May 2012



Homage IV (Male Figure) - 2011 Aluminium and Brass 14" diameter

The graduated, concentric discs represent the different levels of knowledge in the universe. This stylized man and woman are connected to each other and the cosmos.



Synapse - 2012, Painted Wood - 31.5"h.x15.25"w x 4.25"d.

The form of this sculpture portrays the minute gaps or junctions across which impulses or information are transmitted from one to another at the point of contact. It thus symbolizes the synergy of communication, the interaction of two or more forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual parts.

“ The state of feeling given off by this work is that of being in touch with universals (birth, death, creation) which have preoccupied his ancestors, both Classical African and Modernist Western. ”

Frank Bowling,  
O.B.E, Member, Royal Academy of the Arts  
Artist and Art Critic

“ ...in viewing these handsome works, we must not see them just literally; rather it is informative to realize they are a synthesis of what is valid in modern art, together with what is important for Billy Omabegho in the culture of his homeland...Omabegho brings new life and energy to the basic forms and processes of his world. So he returns with new, or perhaps better, with unique perceptions of fundamental African values. Billy Omabegho has therefore expanded and clarified our involvement with life, for the art experience not only envelopes all our senses, but commits us to again and again consider our relationship to nature and to man. Because of this, I believe Omabegho walks in a spiritual kinship with the ancient masters of Ife and Benin. ”

Romare Bearden

\*Romare Bearden is considered one of the most important American artists of the 20th century. He depicted aspects of black culture in a Cubist style. From [www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)



“

I first met Omabegho in New York City in the late 1970's. At the time he was doing these marvelous plexiglas sculptures painted black. The forms were simple and reflected the prevailing New York City interest in Minimalism. But underneath it all a powerful cultural presence resonated. It was not hard to read these forms as referencing traditional African masks and figures and it was intriguing for me to remember that this work may have been the harbinger of the return to content that marked the art world in the next decade.

Fast forward thirty plus years and I reconnect with Billy and his wife Ruth in New York City. This time I am working on a project that is looking at art, craft, and design in the global African universe. Again I encounter Billy translating tradition from wood to plexiglas... This is his unique gift which is evident in this work, the ability to ease out the content in contemporary art, the skill to render abstract form as a marker for the recognizable and the courage to combine divergent tendencies into a powerful synthesis.

Lowery Stokes Sims  
Curator, Museum of Arts and Design, New York

”



Transformation Modules - 2011 Stainless Steel 11" x 5.25"w

Modules rearrange and transformation to become bird or fish forms or pillars or whatever...



Special Thanks to:

Alan & Ekaba Davies, Joe Obiagio,  
Kavita Chellerams, Oliver Enwonwu,  
Robin & Hugh Campbell,  
Neil Coventry & Arra Vineyards

Exhibition space provided by the Wheatbaker

Photography by Jamaal Levine  
Editorial & Artistic Direction: Sandra Mbanefo Obiagio  
Design & Layout: Adeyinka Akingbade  
Editorial Contribution: Ruth Omabegho

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