

Portrait of J.D.' Okhai Ojeikere, © André Magnin, courtesy Magnin-A

---

## J.D.' Okhai Ojeikere

---

## Biography

Born in 1930, Ovbomu, Nigeria

Died in 2014, Lagos, Nigeria, where he lived and worked

J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere was raised in a small village in rural southwestern Nigeria. In 1950, he bought a modest Brownie D camera, and a neighbour taught him the rudiments of photography. In 1951 he began to seek work from the Ministry of Information in Ibadan, repeatedly sending the same letter: "I would be very grateful if you would use me for any kind of work in your photographic department." His persistence paid off in 1954, when he was offered a position as a darkroom assistant. Just as Nigeria was shedding colonial rule in 1961, he became a still photographer for Television House Ibadan, a division of the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Services, the first television station in Africa. Jazz musician Steve Rhodes was director of programming and Ojeikere has recalled, the spirit of the time: "Just after independence, we were full of ideas and energy. We were going to conquer the world."

In 1963 he moved to Lagos to work for West Africa Publicity. In 1967 he joined the Nigerian Arts Council, and during their festival of the following year he began to take series of photographs dedicated to Nigerian culture. This body of work, now consisting of thousands of images, has become a unique anthropological, ethnographic, and documentary national treasure. Most African photographers of his generation only worked on commission; this project, unique of its kind, flourished without any commercial support.

The Hairstyle series, which consists of close to a thousand photographs, is the largest and the most thorough segment of Ojeikere's archive. "To watch a 'hair artist' going through his precise gestures, like an artist making a sculpture, is fascinating. Hairstyle are an art form," Ojeikere has commented. He photographs hairstyles every day in the street, in offices, at parties. He records each subject systematically: from the rear, sometimes in profile, and occasionally head on. Those from the rear are almost abstract and best reveal the sculptural aspect of the hairstyles.

For Ojeikere, this is a never-ending project as hairstyles evolve with fashion: "All these hairstyles are ephemeral. I want my photographs to be noteworthy traces of them. I always wanted to record moments of beauty, moments of knowledge. Art is life. Without art, life would be frozen."

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2015

*J.D.'Okhai Ojeikere*, Museum of Bamako, Mali (curator: Bisi Silva)  
*Staying Power*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK

2013

*J.D. Okhai Ojeikere: Hairstyle*, Wilmotte gallery at lichfield studios, London, UK

2005

Blaffer Gallery, Houston, U.S.A

2002

*Hairstyle*, Wedge Gallery, Toronto, Canada

2001

*J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere*, MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland

2000

*J.D.'Okhai Ojeikere*, Cartier Foundation For Contemporary Art, Paris, France

1995

*J.D.'Okhai Ojeikere*, National Arts Council, Lagos, Nigeria

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

2015-2019

*Making Africa, A Continent of Contemporary Design, Travelling Exhibition*  
(curators: Amélie Klein, Okwui Enwezor)

Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany; Guggenheim Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain  
CCCB Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain; Kunsthal Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Netherlands  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico;  
Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, USA

2018

*Structures of Identity - Photography from The Walther Collection*, FOAM, Amsterdam, Holland

2017

*Art/Afrique : le nouvel atelier \_ The Insiders : a selection of works (1989 to 2009) from the Jean Pigozzi collection of contemporary African Art*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France (curators: Suzanne Pagé, Angéine Scherf, Ludovic Dellande; scientific exhibition council: André Magnin)

*AFRICA. Raccontare un mondo*, PAC Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milano, Italy (curator: Adelina Von Fürstenberg)

2016

*Regarding Africa: Contemporary Art and Afro-Futurism*, Art Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel (curator: Ruth Direktor)

*African Portraits: Omar Victor Diop, Seydou Keïta, Aida Muluneh, Malick Sidibé & J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere*, HackelBury Gallery, London, England

2015

*In and Out of the Studio : Photographic Portraits from West Africa*, Metropolitan Museum, New York, USA (curators: Giulia Paoletti, Yaelle Biro)

2014

*Mémoires vives*, Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art, Paris, France

*Here Africa*, Musée des Suisses du Monde, Geneva, Switzerland

*Tribute to Frédéric Bruly Bouabré & J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France

2013

*Il Palazzo Enciclopedico, Venice Biennale*, 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice, Italy

*Sartorial Moments and the Nearness of Yesterday*, Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, USA (curator: Bisi Silva)

2012

*Cheveux Chéris*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France (curator: Yves Le Fur)

2010

*Anos 70, Fotografia y vida cotidiana*, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo, Seville, Spain (curators: Sergio Mah, Paul Wombell)

2006

*100% Africa*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain (curator: André Magnin)

2005/2006

*Arts of Africa*, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art, Washington DC., U.S.A

*African Art Now: Masterpieces from the Jean Pigozzi Collection* (curator: André Magnin)

National Museum of African Art, Washington DC, U.S.A

Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, U.S.A

Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston, U.S.A

2005

*Arts of Africa*, Grimaldi Forum, Monaco (curator: André Magnin)

2004

*Joy of Life - Malick Sidibé and Ojeikere, Two Photographers from Africa*, Hara Museum, Tokyo, Japan

2003/ 2004

*Parures de tête*, Musée Dapper, Paris, France (curators: Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau, Iris Hahner)

2001

*Century City: art and culture in the modern metropolis*, Tate Modern, London, UK (curator: Iwona Blaswick)

1996

*Nigerian Traditional Hairstyle*, Goethe-Institut, Lagos, Nigeria

1978

*Photography in Advertising*, 50th Anniversary of Lintas Limited, Lagos, Nigeria

# Nigerian women's elaborate hairstyles – in pictures

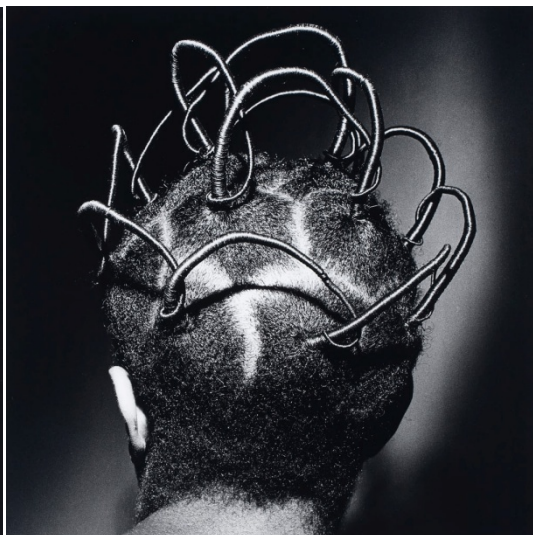
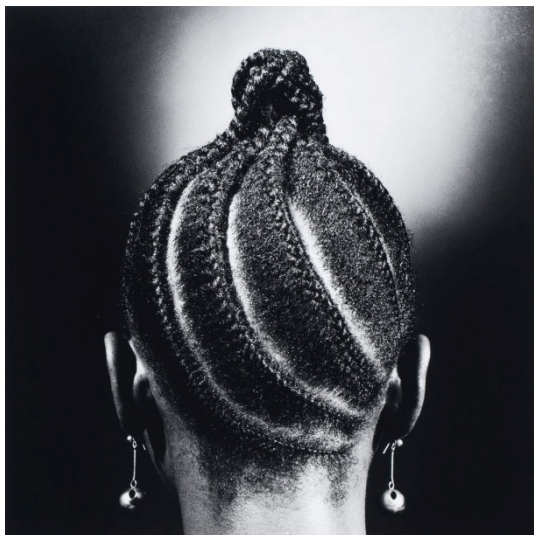
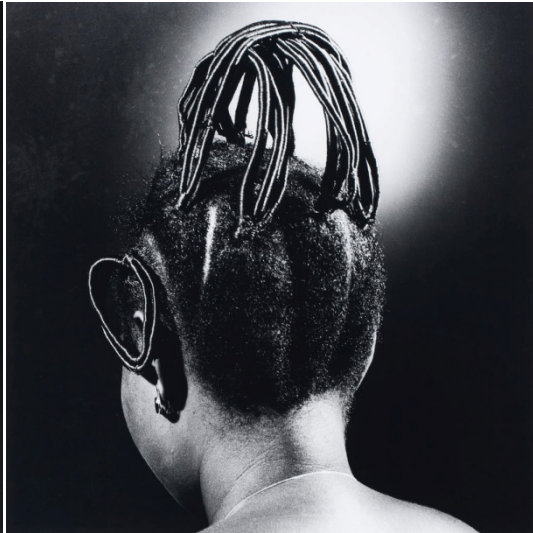
By Kathryn Bromwich

Sat 23 Jun 2018



In Nigeria, women's hairstyles can carry a number of different meanings and messages. These plaits and elaborate structures take anywhere between 30 minutes and five hours to create and can mark special occasions such as weddings and birthdays, denote a particular family or region or respond to political and artistic movements of the day. The acclaimed Nigerian photographer JD 'Okhai Ojeikere spent 40 years immortalising nearly 1,000 of these hairstyles, until his death in 2014. "Apart from being fascinated by their beauty and the artistic nature of each hairstyle, he documented them for posterity," says his son, photographer Amaize Ojeikere. There is a danger, he adds, that these skills will be lost. "Particularly now the younger generation think it is 'old-school'. That is one of the reasons the images were taken: to showcase the beauty of our people."

*Structures of Identity* will be at the [Foam photography museum](#) in Amsterdam from 29 June to 29 August.





Photograph: All images: Untitled [Hairstyle], 1966-75 © J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere. Courtesy of The Walther Collection and Galerie Magnin-A, Paris.