

CHAPTER 4:

SEMIOLOGICAL AND UTILITARIAN INTRODUCTION OF MAPOLY ART SCHOOL, ABEOKUTA, NIGERIA

Contributed By

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INTRODUCTION

The aesthetics of African arts have been appreciated by a lot of scholars and used as inspiration for their works. Upon getting motivation from African arts, Picasso stepped up his works and modernised Western arts through African inspiration. According to Picasso, *most present-day Western arts were sourced from African origin and upon which he started a revolution in Western arts* (Dereje, Liu and Zhou, 2013). Evidence from excavations and readily accessible works from various Nigerian Art cultures such as Nok, Benin, Igbo Ukwu, Owo, Esie and Ife were not enough to advance a developmental reason to fuel the passionate drive of Aina Onabolu that Art be included in Nigerian education curriculum as at 1915, 18 years after the discovery of first bronze works from Africa through the Benin punitive expedition (Alex Marshal, 2011) and these works were deemed to have been made hundreds of years earlier. His clamour raged till 1922 when he was appointed to teach Art at King's College, Lagos and in 1932 when he obtained approval for the Art syllabus he drafted to be used to teach Art. At the emergence of Aina Onabolu, he had to contend with European poor reputation for African artists as primitive and crude despite high and mighty skills seen in the works discovered in the art traditions earlier mentioned, the reputation of good standing was built over time when educational dimension was

added to his practice and his students/apprentices or other notable artists whose training were facilitated or influenced by him such as Ben Enwonwu, Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Solomon Wangboje, Akinola Lasekan, etc

This is attributed to an assertion that arts and artists have raised the bar of creative exploits of the talent class while boosting the entrepreneurial acumen of the economic-skill profile-building class; on this foundation was the establishment of formal art schools laid supported on the sidelines by informal training workshops with each registering a formidable niche for the pleasurable delight of all. This wave of establishment of formal art schools was started by the Nigerian College of Arts and Science Technology, Zaria (Now Ahmadu Bello University), then nicknamed Zaria Art School (Chukueggu, 2010).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The paper aims to describe the exploration of symbols and utility in the artworks produced in the studio experimentations of the students of the Department of Art and Industrial Design, of Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta and the objectives are:

1. to introduce the Department of Art and Industrial Design, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta;
2. to chronicle the artworks and art forms of MAPOLY Art School;
3. examine the interaction and influence of MAPOLY Art School on her immediate environment in terms of Yoruba semiotics, culture, trade and aesthetic enhancement

A Brief History of MAPOLY Art School, Abeokuta

The rich historical heritage of artistic practice of Ogun State is significant to the Nigerian artistic map in all facets and across generations; this among other paramount factors such as the need for an increased capacity for training of Artists and Designers as part of the creativity to drive the development of technical

manpower and entrepreneurship thrust for Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) in the economy. In 2013, the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) approved the flag-off of the Department of Art and Industrial Design for Awarding a National Diploma (ND) in the State-owned institution which was established in 1979 as Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta (OGUN-POLY) and renamed Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta (MAPOLY) in 1999. The course objectives are set thus: At the end of the National Diploma programme, the diplomats should be able to:

1. assist effectively in running art and design studios;
2. analyse and solve simple problems related to art and design;
3. maintain, select and manipulate tools and equipment used in the profession;
4. provide technical support, especially in visual form to industries, organisations, institutions, etc where such services are required.

Armed with the foregoing objectives, the first set of students were admitted in the 2013/14 academic session, the curriculum is structured in four semesters of classroom lectures, and studio/workshop activities consisting of three main components which encompass General Studies courses, Foundation course, Professional core courses, four-month SIWES Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) as well as final year design project. The studio practice areas are life and general drawing, ceramics, graphics, painting, sculpture and textiles.

Olayemi Azeem Bello (ND, 1990; B.A., 1995, M.A., 2003, PGDE, 2013) was appointed as the pioneer coordinator of the department, later appointed also as the pioneer Head of the Department. He is a painter, stage designer, interior designer and a skilled teacher. Other members of his academic team were, Akeem Ashiyanbi, and Lateef Adedayo Lasisi; they were later joined by Adeola I. Oridola, Oladunni Philip Adesiji, Akinlolu Olusola

Olawale, Rotimi Samuel Oligbinde, Ajibola Sunday Adetoyinbo, Stephen Oluwatosin Ojomo and Amusa Moshood.

Interaction and Influence of MAPOLY Art School with the Community

Since its establishment, the resonating impacts and influence of MAPOLY Art School have been glowingly felt on the campus since 2015 with the first Art Exhibition hosted by the Department. This event witnessed the unveiling of the first-ever artistic sculptural piece in the 36-year-old institution. The work titled *Diligence* is located at the Car park of the School of Environmental Studies which also serves as the Exhibition Ground of the department. More are being added in the subsequent years, and the springing of creative artistic paintings, crafts and murals abounds strategically and aesthetically on campus particularly evidenced at venues such as the Administrative Block (Adebisi Adebayo Building), the Main Library (Salawu Abiola Memorial Library), Centre for Entrepreneurship, Entry route to the School of Communication and Information Technology (SCIT), Entry corridor of the School of Environmental Studies (SENVS) and School of Engineering adorned with sculptural pieces of diverse media. The SENVS Studios, Engineering Lecture Theatre, Directorate of Students' Affairs Building, Accountancy Lecture Room, Architectural Studios, and Office Complex of SENVS are all enhanced with creative murals. The graphic design dexterity of the lecturers and students of the department is being felt on a daily basis on book cover designs commissioned by lecturers on campus, the design of the corporate logo of Moshood Abiola University of Science and Technology (MAUSTECH yet to be unveiled), Universite du Liberte, Benin Republic. The offices of the Director, SENVS and not leaving out the office of the Head of Department of Arts and Industrial Design are embellished in uniquely designed Tie-dye fabric material as their window blinds, while the walls were adorned with works of different media and sizes executed by

the students of the Department. Other products of the Department including graphic signages such as *Point of Order* and *Code of Conduct* were located at the Marketing/Market Bus Stop and campus shuttle Bus Shed respectively.

The mastery and culture of Adire art and craft practice by the Egba people of Abeokuta have been explored by exposing our students to training in this crafts of textile designs during their SIWES programme, this affords the Department a diffusion of ideas as we encourage symbiotic collaboration and complimentary learning process between the studio and practising professionals thereby inculcating the principle of complementarity between the “Town and the Gown”. The result of this has started yielding early positive results as records abound that a good number of our students have carved a for themselves in creating unique designs that have caught the fancy of the Nigerian Adire Market.

Another benefit of this interaction was the TETFund Fabrication Grant obtained by Orelaja, Lasisi, Adesiji and Akinlolu in 2017 for the fabrication of the Repromaster Dyeing Machine designed by the lecturers of the department. The repromaster dyeing machine speeds up the dyeing process, reduces exposure to dyestuff by the artist and saves cost. The machine consists of a drum compartment which houses a roller with four arms, as the roller is driven by the connected motor, it moves the fabric through the injected hot dye solution from the dye solution compartment. Around the drum is a huge perforated cylinder with four doors that lift out from each arm while fabric materials are being loaded inside and shut water-tight while the roller is moving the fabric through the dye solution. A timer circuit terminates the operation after the set time of the rolling action which is dependent on the concentration of the dye solution and the type of fabric being processed.

While MAPOLY Art School evolves, our products in the area of fabrication are worthy of exhibition as we have outputs such as the Repromaster Dyeing Machine, Electric and Gas fired Oven,

Paint mixer, Ceramic plunger, metal and wooden tables, metal panel doors made from scrap metals, multi-compartment locker cabinets, Studio light box, printing table and several other fabrications serving the need of the Department as well as other Departments such as Science Laboratory Technology, Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure Management, Mechanical Engineering, Architecture etc. This interaction has contributed greatly to job creation among the youth populace and with the potential to do much more, raised more creative minds as well as advanced teaching, practice and research desires of all stakeholders.

In the professional realm, we have maintained cordial relationship with the National Gallery of Art, from whom we have enjoyed support at all times; the Society of Nigerian Artists, where the current Public Relations Officer, Ogun State Chapter is Mr. Adesiji, a graphic lecturer in the department.

Results of the Creative Exploits of the MAPOLY Art School in Various Studio Practices

Communicative purposes of encoding and embellishment are worldwide applications of symbols used in artworks, which are rendered in motifs. However, the conceptual process of decoding the motifs culturally demands learning to gain mastery in approaching its interpretation which this paper aims to achieve.

CERAMICS STUDIO

Ceramics studio works concentrate on the creation of utility and decorative wares in terracotta. Clay is a natural fusible earth. That is when wet with the proper amount of water, it will tend to hold the shape which is given to it. This property is also known as plasticity and it is one of the principal virtues of the material (Daniel, 1974:210.) Pottery is a craft that has been in existence for centuries, since man discovered the need for its use, it has become a vital aspect of African cultural and traditional life. Necessity gave birth to the creation of vessels and figurines; this necessity includes

utilitarian, decorative and religious needs (Umoru, 2003). The Ceramics lecturers in the Department to date are Oridola I. Adeola, NCE (Fine and Applied Arts, 2007) – Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto-Ijanikin, Lagos, B. A. (Ceramics, 2010) and MFA (Ceramics, 2015), both from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. He is a scholar and ceramic artist described by Adepegba (2015) as a profound user of clay from its raw stage to the finished stage, . . . exploring other complimentary materials to produce wholesome ceramic works that are unique in their classes. The other lecturer is Adetoyinbo Ajibola S., a Ceramic graduate of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, a master’s degree student in the Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The ceramic mastery of Ajibola is evident in his unique forms from floral and fauna for utilitarian and aesthetic purposes.

Ceramic Works

A o m’erin j’oba

The Yoruba Folktale is one of the several thousands of indigenous African stories that teach the African child lots of home lessons. However, as a result of modernization resulting from the influence of Western education and cultures, African folktales are not given a rightful social place in the lives of both the young and old (Okunade, 2003). Pottery as an art has been in existence for quite some time, Glemn (1971) suggested that pottery most likely emerged out of the need of the Neolithic Families. The terracotta work “A o m’erin j’oba” is an example of a work of art otherwise called ise-wa in Yoruba land. This ceramics work is a combination of ceramic and sculpture which makes it a ceramic sculpture. The canon of frontality of the African sculpture is observed in the ceramics sculpture. The figure assumes a single posture as it suits its purpose as a free-standing figure serving the purpose of a flower vase. The cracks depict the painful agony the Elephant went

through and the decorative calabash depicts the deceitfulness of the human.

Assemblage

Terracotta is fired clay ware and can be termed as unglazed reddish brown pottery. Pottery vessels for utilitarian purposes and environmental pottery are a few of the developed ceramic practices among the Yorubas. Sculptural ceramic pots should not only be seen in religious or ritual contexts but also for aesthetic beautification that reflects traditional and social-cultural values. Most of the motifs and symbols used on the pottery are greatly stylized and loaded with exoteric meanings relevant and related to various and individual thoughts, emphasizing their importance. The works are mainly for decoration and reflect how forms can be employed in trade-ceramic forms.

Passage

The terracotta pot titled, *Passage*, is embellished with Nigerian traditional motifs such as the Northern knot signifying *unity in diversity* of the Northern Nigeria's people; this set of people are referred to as people of Oke-oya among the Yorubas, implying they came beyond River Niger, *alangba* (lizard) meaning, I do not know your thoughts towards me, footprint signifying hereditary traits, linkages and/or movement. These three were utilised by the artist to communicate that while I do not know your thoughts towards me, you must relate with me with caution because we may have come from two divides by River Niger, yet we may share one form of ancestral linkage or the other.

Visual Communication Design

Basic output expected from this area of experimentation includes branding, corporate design concepts, advertising and publicity design and layouts, television graphics, photography, lettering and all areas of their applications. Adesiji Oladunni Philip took up the

assignment of taking classes in this section in 2014. The lecturer is a Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA) – trained printmaker, designer, photographer and art educator in the simplest of possible terms. He bagged his National Diploma from Federal Polytechnic, Ede (Electrical/Electronics Engineering, 2005), B. Tech – Industrial Design (Graphics) and M. Tech – Graphics, both from FUTA from where his printmaking skill was acquired and he adopted the White-line woodcut which characterises the printmaking projects from MAPOLY Art School. Among the works produced so far in this area are:

Invocations

These woodcut prints were dedicated to the children who are victims of terrorism in Northeast Nigeria as orphans, and war slaves particularly the Chibok girls whose rescue is still daily prayer in the lips of compassionate Nigerians after 6 years in captivity. The twin celebrates the gallantry, sacrifice and resilience of the Nigeria Armed Forces cheering them to victory over all forms of insurrection against the peace of Nigeria.

Still Remember, Still Grateful

The mosaic project is an experimentation with glass tiles produced in honour of a heroine (and her colleagues) of a pandemic, Ebola whose waves would have caused unimaginable loss of lives and economic resources to Africa's most populous nation. The mosaic painting of the portraiture of Dr Stella Adadevoh is executed on a 4 mm thick Aluminium composite panel popularly called Alucobond dimensioned 48in X 48in utilizing 1 in X 1 in glass tiles stuck on the board with Arabic gum. While mosaic art has been widely employed for decorative purposes, this project has attempted making a commemorative portraiture of a Nigeria heroine as an artistic input to celebrate the diligence, patriotism, loyalty, brilliance, ethical and professional excellence of Dr Amos Abaniwo; Nurse Justina Obi Ejelon, Nurse Evelyn Ukoand Dr

Stella Ameyo Adadevoh. This is an avenue to tell their beautiful souls, their relatives and the whole world that we are grateful because their labour of love is still fresh in our memory.

Painting

This studies the creation of pictures for aesthetic, functional and decorative purposes such as portraiture, murals, mosaics and other pictorial compositions. The pioneer coordinator of the Department and later HOD, Mr. Olayemi Azeem Bello has been taking painting classes since inception of the department with an array of creative young minds raised by his intensive attention on the individual students passing through his hands. The painter and innovative stage designer had ND (Architecture,1990) from Ogun State Polytechnic, Abeokuta now Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, B.A. (Fine Art, 1995) and M. A. (Visual Art, 2003) from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, and University of Ibadan respectively. Also in the painting section is Mr Moshood Amusa, an HND Painting graduate of Yaba College of Technology, whose mastery of murals, figures, life and general drawing is exceptional both in teaching and practice.

Dexterity

Pyrography is the act of decorating wood or other burnt marks resulting from the controlled applications of heated objects (Walkers, 2005). *Dexterity* (fig. 8) is an aesthetic piece to showcase the tie – dye tradition, trade culture and profession of the Egba people, the immediate host of MAPOLY Art School. The process of executing it involved burning the surface of the particle board, with a naked flame from gas burner, incising the image on the burnt board and scratching out the shades to bring-out the desired detail. It is our prayer that the soul of the artist, Koleowo Temitope Abimbola, continues to rest in perfect peace, she died in 2019. Her practice and commissions were creative masterpieces in the few years she held the brush and mixed the paints.

Asa keke

In depicting Yoruba connotation that *Asa keke aajo ewa ni nse, a bu abaja, aajo ewa ni nse*; Adebayo Ogunsola, a 2016 ND diplomate was of the opinion that since body tattooing resurfaced and gained global patronage despite the campaign of the West against facial tribal marks among Africans, he assured that facial marks will return to be a popular trend as a result of modernization which will help in preserving this heritage of decoration (Ossai – llyah and Ogunrombi , 2012, Rosevear, 1990), ethno – spiritual identification (Drewal, 1988 Ayeni, 2004), beauty enhancement (Oyetade, 1982), therefore, there is a need to consider the assertion of Bello & Adesiji (2017) that policymakers and regulatory agencies in the health sector need to have a rethink on harnessing the economic gains which can be gotten from safe body marking.

Ba w'aye, b'ari, laari!

This project work aims at using recyclable waste items embedded in painting mix-media work with a focus on representing the destiny journey of a man on earth based on Yoruba's belief in destiny as well as the semiotics of cultural icons among the Yorubas. The process of birth biologically registers a large mass into the destiny race with each struggling to attain the top among their colleagues in different strata; education, politics, career, leadership, religion etc, however, the factors determining the attainment of such pursuit may be total according to their destiny (which is inalterable) by different scholars e.g. Oduwole (1996), Abimbola (1976) or alterable, according to other scholars such as Campbell (1996), Idowu (1962). This informs the role played by social interaction (symbolised in this work as *ooya, alangba*, spiral lines representing curly nature of a snake which may be experienced in human relationship) and character of individuals which may clog their progress or even eliminate them untimely from the race of destiny (see Bello and Adesiji, 2021, for full semiological analysis)

Sculpture

Modelling in clay, carving in wood, construction in metal and paper to serve as decoration, monuments, insignia, totems, etc to record history, immortalise, award, architectural support etc are areas of exploration that sculptural practice entails. MAPOLY Art School students at different times have been moulded by tested hands of Ashiyanbi, Oligbinde and Akinlolu. Ashiyanbi Akeem Abiodun is a sculpture graduate of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, B. A (Fine Art), M. A. (Visual Art, 2003) – University of Ibadan. He is an eclectic and well-versed Art Historian. Oligbinde Samuel Rotimi had a B. A. (Fine Art - Sculpture, 2012), MFA – Sculpture (2019) both from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. His works project basic characteristics African as seen in facial presentation, directional emphasis, stylisation, boldness of forms and hierarchy. Mr Akinlolu Olusola Olawale, an HND-Sculpture graduate of Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu (2013) has mastery of forms rendered in various media such as cement, fibreglass, as well as wood, is excellent and the works of his students can attest to this.

The Lost Waste

The Lost Waste utilises waste paper as a material form in sculpture. Waste paper has long symbolised a world of carefree consumerism and revolutionary innovation, opening doors of creative expression for artists to mop up the mess of all. The high relief work is a depiction of visualisation of the popular Argungu Fishing Festival celebrated in Kebbi and other northern Nigerian States. It is acclaimed as Africa's biggest Fishing Celebration. In the paper sculpture, one can feel the celebration of volume which is an expression of the patience and diligent labour each fisherman passes through in an attempt to make the biggest catch. The work

is cast with waste paper and top bond, edged with welded scrap metals from brake pads – giving a rhythmic finish.

Iya ilu

The metal sculpture titled *Iya ilu*, the Talking Drum of the Yoruba people is popularly employed for socio-cultural, religious, ritual, and other related purposes in the southwestern part of Nigeria and the world over where Yoruba people live or have inhabited before. The hourglass-shaped drum has two drum heads covered with animal skin and connected along the wooden frame with leather/skin tension cords. The cords are the instrument of tuning the pitch by the drummer. Adorned in traditional Yoruba attire with a matching *Abeti-aja* cap, the drummer welcomes all to the walkway leading to the Department of Art and Industrial Design just as palace drummers welcome the king's guests in Yoruba palaces and to other social gatherings.

Mother's Love

Passion, care and love of a mother are the expression of this fibreglass work. It shows the extent a mother goes in nurturing her children and helps to actualise the dreams of her children. The work is cast in fibre polyester resin and patinated with bronze finishing, it is installed on a high pedestal seated in the middle of a water fountain. The artists were inspired by the attribute of flamingos flocking in groups and catering for one another.

TEXTILES

Textiles study the art of weaving, decorating and designing fabric and related materials in batik, tie and dye, embroidery etc for diverse applications. In MAPOLY, this section has had Lasisi Lateef Adedayo, a widely experimental artist, and the self-acclaimed inventor of Embroidery on Canvas. He obtained NCE (Fine and Applied Arts, 2004) from Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Otto-Ijanikin, Lagos, B. A. (Textiles, 2010) and

MFA (Textiles, 2015), both from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Ojomo Oluwatosin Stephen graduated from the Federal University of Technology, Akure with B. Tech (Textiles – Industrial Design, 2009) and M. Tech (Textile, 2016), he has exhibited interesting creativity in textile design and prints and also Umeh Chioma Emilia, she bagged a B. A. – Fine and Applied Arts, Textile specialisation.

Ankara Yebeyebe

This mixed media work executed by surface cut and paste textured pattern using left-over African prints (Ankara) collected from fashion design shops with skin areas rendered in acrylic medium on 1-inch thick plywood is installed on the outer wall of the Textile Studio. Textile waste is globally estimated at 92 million tonnes each year (Beall, 2020) and poses a severe danger to human health and the ecosystem. An attempt to repurpose waste motivated Ibukun to depict the dancing culture of the Yoruba people with waste textile materials.

The work consists of a *Bata* drummer, the *bàtá* drum is a Membranophonic double-headed/conical drum, the largest of a set of drums (typically three to four) used by the Yoruba people. At inception and for some centuries past, the drum set was used as a speech surrogate and was associated with Sàngó, Esu, Egungun, Oya and other Yoruba orisa cults, the male dancer is adorned in matching dresses and traditional *Gobi* caps while the three female dancers have flamboyant head gears all rendered in Ankara pieces. In the Yoruba Culture, the fabric used for tying the Gele is the Aso-Oke which is a hand-woven fabric. After weaving, it is made into a rectangular piece that is long enough to go around the head at least twice. The art of gele is marked by a sense of dynamic form, in which eloquent and elegant creases, vertical stretching, horizontal elongation, perpendicular balance, and spiral twists, among other design configurations, are used to create a structure out of cloth, a structure that acts as a crown for the head.

SUSTAINABILITY

At the setting out of the Department of Art and Industrial Design, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, part of our sustainability plan includes the following:

- i. Organising yearly Art Exhibition – this has been taking place since 2015 when the first set of diplomates graduated; it is usually held during the Students’ Activities Week to carry along the majority of the students’ population on campus. However, the 2022 edition billed for March 21st, 2022 is remarkable as 21st March is the International Day of Colour, this date has also been approved for the Annual Exhibition of the Department by the Polytechnic Management led by the Acting Rector, Dr David Adeoye Odedeji. It is hoped to be graced by dignitaries from the State government, academia, professional bodies and in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art. It is noteworthy to state that the exhibition has become self-sustaining as we raise banners of artistic learning and practice as well as raise the bar of the artistic teaching process.
- ii. Other areas of financial support for the Department are commissioning from public and private agencies in the fast-growing Gateway State.
- iii. Aesthetic need for indoor and outdoor spaces, high rate of industrialisation, diverse clay deposits, world-renown traditional artistic practice etc. are other factors assuring of bright future for art consumption in Ogun State.

Summary

This paper has introduced the Department of Art and Industrial Design, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria also referred to as MAPOLY Art School; it provided a chronicle of the artworks and art forms from the home base of Aina Onabolu, the visionary of art inclusion in Nigerian education curriculum. From contextual assertions of the paper, the objectives and justification for creating the Department have been fulfilled as studio practices in ceramics, graphics, painting, sculpture and textiles have impacted the lives of the people of Ogun State in terms of providing skilled and creative artists who can effectively run art studios, solve art & design related problems, manipulate tools and materials employed in artistic practice as well as provide technical support in the industrial development of Ogun State and the nation at large. Beyond this, a strong army of creative entrepreneurs has been raised through the training provided in the last seven years of the existence of this art, applied art and industrial design training centre with attendant cordial relationships within professional and required social engagements. The paper has also provided an educative trajectory to the Yoruba semiological study of motifs and cultural connotations.

Finally, among the immediate impact of this Art School is the efforts directed at checking climate change through recycling and repurposing wastes such as scrap metals for sculptural pieces e.g. Elephant sculpture-in-the-round, Ostrich sculpture-in-the-round, Iya-ilu sculpture-in-the-round, waste paper for relief sculptures, waste tyres for window decoration (for Painting Studio) and decorative stools; waste textile materials for footmats, decorative stools.

Questions

1. How did MAPOLY evolve?
2. What genres of Art are practised and taught in MAPOLY?
3. What are the sustainability plans for the institution?

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