

OlongoAfrica Black Orpheus Fellowship (Application)

Kólá Túbòsún
December 18, 2024





OlongoAfrica is offering long-term and short-term opportunities to support quality research and writing on the history, politics, and influence of the *Black Orpheus* journal and the Mbari Club generation. We are offering both in-person fellowships on the ground in Lagos Nigeria, as well as

remote fellowships in Nigeria and elsewhere around the world involving independent research with the digitized (and physical) archives of *Black Orpheus* journals.

Read more about the project [here](#).

Long-term fellowships involve a longer commitment between OlongoAfrica and the selected fellow over a period of time for a specified project direction, while short-term fellowships involve targeted/commissioned short-term work in specified directions. The fellowships are open to anyone (professional writer/scholar or not) with interest in African literature, *Black Orpheus* journal, early African art and literary productions, literary history, comparative literature, modern writing, literary journals, and adjacent topics and subjects relating to the sixties, post-colonial literature, and others not listed here. Preference will be made for those with some earlier interest, enthusiasm, or work history in this direction of our interest.

Aided by generous support by **Open Society Foundations**, we are empowered to pay for short-term or long-term research, either alone or in combination with physical residencies in Lagos, in collaboration with **Angels & Muse, Guest Artists Space (G.A.S) Foundation** and other partners. We are also open to one-term payments for short-term projects. Both the short-term and long-term fellowships will be ongoing throughout 2025.

The fellowships are also open to visual (physical or electronic) artists interested in engaging with the visual art heritage of *Black Orpheus* journal, either for study or for derivative reinterpretation.

We are calling for applications from fellows interested in the following broad directions, and other directions not mentioned here:

Suggested Research Areas

1. **Finding Mbari.** The location of the Mbari Club in Old Gbági in Ìbàdàn has gradually acquired a mythical status. The famous Mbari Club was first located in the heart of downtown Ìbàdàn before being relocated to Onírèké Road. We're seeking an expository piece that seeks to locate the current state of the building that used to be Mbari Club in Ìbàdàn, with conversations with those who use it/live in it today, and any other relevant details that can be gleaned from living artists who interacted with the Mbari Club in the 60s.
2. **Conversation with living participants:** Theo Vincent, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Demas Nwoko, Wole Şóyínká, etc. What do they remember? We're seeking someone to commit to interviewing all of them to get a more permanent record from primary sources, while they're still alive.
3. **Black Orpheus covers and art: inception till date** The art production on the cover of *Black Orpheus* journals were part of its distinctive features. We're seeking something creative that examines the covers and tells us what we don't already know — not just the artists behind them and the stories that inspired them (much of this is known) but anything else that the covers can bring to the contemporary conversations about visual arts, AI, graphic design, and visual art augmentations to text. We're seeking someone who understands (or is at least interested in) visual arts to comb through all the editions in order to tell us the types of works that were published, what they represented, how they were appraised and accepted, and what else we may have forgotten or missed over the years.
4. **Black Orpheus editorial directions from Beier to Vincent.** This can explore how editorship directs narrative, quality and even credibility of print material in this case an African journal. This can either take its own direction or combine with the cover exploration in #2 above.
5. **Finding the Women in Black Orpheus.** The unexplored connection/transition between

Susanne Wenger, who designed most of the *Black Orpheus* covers and Georgina Beier who took over towards the end, might make an interesting story. Our broad inquiries include identifying the female contributors in *Black Orpheus*, gender politics in their works, and women and labor of editorial production.

6. **Black Orpheus and the Politics of Criticism.** It's not uncommon today to hear that "Nigerian writers are petty" or that conversations between us are vicious or non-substantive. Literary reviews are taken personally and often lead to big rifts and week-long conversations. Looking through how works were reviewed in *Black Orpheus* might show us that what we see today is nothing new. It also allows for interrogation of how works we consider great today were discussed in their time.
7. **The Western Gaze: comparing reviews in *BO* written by foreigners and those by African colleagues.** A follow-up to the earlier point, how were the critical reviews in *Black Orpheus* different, depending on who is writing them, and whatever aim they had in mind? Looking through these scores of editions might provide us answers.
8. **Motif and Themes in *Black Orpheus*:** A look through the multiple genres of works published in *Black Orpheus* will throw up patterns, motifs, and tropes. What big themes might there be? How might we use works in *Black Orpheus* to reflect on certain tropes of African writings and politics, the exile of African writers who found a home in the Mbari spaces, and other directions?
9. **Metadata.** Just as a matter of statistics, how many short stories were published in *Black Orpheus*? How many poems? How many artists? How many critical reviews? How many African writers/artists versus foreign ones? We're seeking someone to look through the archives with the express purpose of breaking the publication span of *Black Orpheus* down to component parts, in digestible formats. Part of this work has already begun at OlongoAfrica.
10. **Translations and any related directions** using the archives of *Black Orpheus* as a springboard. *Black Orpheus*, after all, started as a way to bring Francophone and Afro-American literature to Anglophone African readers, before it morphed into a platform for African literature-in-translation-in-English showcased to the larger world.
11. If you have any other ideas not listed here, or directions of academic research that can be helped with access to the *Black Orpheus journal*, please mention them in your application and they will be considered.

Terms and Other Conditions

- Fellows will be selected on originality of proposal, feasibility of project completion, reasonability of scope, budget, and ambition, and quality of applicant (determined both by application or work history/repute).
- We are committed to a funding of between 350,000 naira and 500,000 per month for long-term funding (over a few months) and between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000 naira for individual short term funding for specified projects. And sometimes, in lieu of direct funding, we are committed to collaborations with residency spaces in Nigeria to host the fellows for specified periods to do their work. Their physical and professional needs will be met for this period.
- A complete application will include a completed Google Form with up to a one-pager description of proposed study, budget, and a one-pager of previous (relevant) work/or a full CV.
- We are looking for five fellows for a start, but we hope to engage a lot more researchers and writers throughout the year.
- We are looking both for resident fellows, who will work at our designated residencies in Lagos, and non-resident fellows who will work virtually, exploring the digital archives for their

research. Please specify your location and your choice category of our fellowship in your application.

- We will also be contacting artists we are interested in working with throughout 2025, as necessary. If you have other ideas not listed here, please pitch them to us in a one-pager, along with a proposed budget.

[Click here to apply.](#)

If you have any more questions, please direct them to *publisher@olongoafrica.com*.



OLONGO
AFRICA