

Presenting the Digitized Black Orpheus Journals

Kólá Túbòsún

March 23, 2025



It gives us some pleasure to present the digitized copies of *Black Orpheus* journal to the public for the first time.

Over the last six months, we've worked with Archivi.ng, a Nigerian nonprofit digitizing newspapers and other culture materials, to scan all the copies of *Black Orpheus* journals we obtained as part of the *Black Orpheus Revisited* Project started in November 2024, and supported by a grant from the Open Society Foundations. Some copies were donated by Prof. Fẹ́mi Euba in Louisiana. This digitization effort is thanks to these partners, and others like JCAA.

In November, in collaboration with **Art X Lagos**, we exhibited some of the original *Black Orpheus* journals as were published between 1957 and about 1994. The journal was founded by Ulli Beier and had a rotating cast of editors including Janheinz Jahn, Wọ́lé Şóyínká, Christopher Okigbo, Abiola Ìrèlé, among others. The first volume ended in 1967 when Beier left Nigeria for Papua New Guinea, but continued in 1968 under JP Clark and Irele. In fits and stops, the journal trudged on until it finally ceased publication in the mid-nineties.

For many years, they were scarce materials not accessible even to writers in Nigeria around whom many of the creative pieces were first created. One had to go to foreign libraries, bookstores, and private collections to see one. In the last couple of years, academic and anthropological interest in the journal increased, thanks to an exhibition in London in November 2019 and at Chrysler Museum in Virginia in 2021. And each copy that could even be found turned out to be significantly costly to obtain.

Thanks to Open Society Foundations and all those who have supported this project, we are able to

make this available to all.

The digitized versions presented here were created both as a chance to bring the contemporary African creative public into conversation with the legacy of the journal, and as primary resource materials for the *Black Orpheus* fellows chosen in February 2025, and any other artists interested in research and re-interpretation where these materials can be of use. *Black Orpheus* and the work of his cohorts were pivotal in the germination of African literary culture in English in the early sixties, but especially in conversation with the African diaspora, and other literatures in French, Arabic, and other African languages.

Our interrogation of the archives will continue into the future as long as the funding lasts, and as long as there are contemporary writers interested in the history and legacy of this period of our literary, visual arts, and cultural history.

The Materials:

- **The Metadata** (A spreadsheet guide to the content of all of Vol. 1)
- **Volume 1:** No. 1- No. 22 (1957-1967)
- **Volume 2:** No. 1, No. 2. (No. 3 still missing), No 5&6, No. 7 – 1968-1970
- **Volume 3:** No. 1, No 2 & 3 (combined edition) – 1974-1975
- **Volume 4:** No 1, No 2. (The rest still missing)* 1981 –
- **Volume 5:** No. 1, No 2 (others missing*) – 1983 –
- **Volume 6:** No. 1, No. 2. (1986 – 1993)

OlongoAfrica's *Black Orpheus Fellows* have the extra privilege of being able to access the physical magazines through our library partners in Lagos while they do their work. But we encourage research and engagement with this electronic archive by *anyone* interested in African literature, African visual arts, African history, and the sixties in general.

You can read some of the early engagement with the archives [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

We'd be happy to publish what you come up with, if we like it. Send to submissions@olongoafrica.com

Regards,

The Editors.

* If you ever come across any of these rare copies, please reach out. We'd love to either buy or scan them for the purpose of this project and the benefit of all. The extra scanned copies from Volumes 2, 4 and 5 came from Charles Akínșètè at the University of Ibadan and Li Lu from Beijing Foreign Studies University.