

Artistic Visualisation of Rukeme Ufoma Nuserime's Repertoire

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Abstract:

Born of an artist, Rukeme Ufoma Nuserime is himself a drawer, painter, designer, illustrator and art historian from Ekpan extraction of Delta state. Like his father, he also trained at the foremost Nigerian Art School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and further his studies at the Institute of African studies, University of Ibadan and Ogbomosho Art School, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho. Rukeme is indeed an artist of note; his training no doubt, rubbed off well on him with evidential educational, administrative and artistic contributions, since joining the service of Yaba College of Technology in 1985. This study made stint on Rukeme's background, training and lectureship, placing premium on his innovative experimental drawings and paintings. Eight of his art works were repertoire and visualize based on their philology and historic significance. Prominent among them are *Samaru*, *Ara: Mystery of Talking Drum* and *Freedom at Last*, rendered in oil, graphite and glucol. These masterpieces, beyond their stylistic techniques are archival; somewhat spyglasses into socio-political cum economic events of the past. The study therefore hoped, its visualization is crystal and apt enough to rekindle in present and coming generation of artists, consciousness of documentation of current occurrences the times on its prospective audience and possibly provoke documentation of current occurrences for posterity.

Keywords:

Rukeme Ufoma Nuserime, Expression, Visualization, Glucol, Drawing and Painting

1. Introduction

The year 1958 significantly, October 26th witnessed the birth of a child, christened Rukeme Ufoma Nuserime (Note 1) [1] in Warri, Delta state, Nigeria to the family of Pa. Rev. John Nuserime Thomas and Madame Christiana Lucky Thomas nee Oruwvieagone [2,3]. Thomas was not only a trained artist but one of Nigeria's foremost art educationists and administrator per excellence whiles his wife was a school teacher and a petty trader. He can be said to be one of the experimental generations of the Zaria Art School [4,5], Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; graduating with the likes of J. A. Adeka, P. O. Ereje, J. K. Oyewole, J. A. Agbabiaka, Y. A. Grillo, W.A. Olaosebikan and G. O. Talabi in 1960, specializing in Graphics and

Commercial Art [6] Thomas equally had affinity with other generation of grandaunts from his alma-mater; prominent among them are Prof. S. A. Adetoro, Pa. B. Onabrakpeya, Pa. Chief, T. A. Fasuyi and Pa. K. Osinawo [7,8,9].

Thomas, who later change his first name to Noserime [3] started off his career as a graphics artist for a while with one or two commissions, many of which are book illustrations; they included “The Adventure of Temidara”, “British Fauna and Flora”, “The Operations of the Holy Spirit” and “The BBC Summer School” to mention but few [9]. Pa. Noserime was a renowned artist in his own right as an art educator and administrator, having taught art in several schools across the country [10] and West African Examination Councils (WAEC) coordinator for many years [11]. His exceptional and exemplary leadership acumen was attested by all sundry. Though, his desire was to pursue his artistic career in any Nigerian tertiary institution like some of his contemporaries from the Zaria art school [12,13,14]. A dream he had to jettisoned, drawing solace from the Yoruba maxim;

Aye ti e shin o je

Iru die, a je

The life, a horse could not enjoy

Its tail whisk, shall enjoy

Like the horse whisk that, lives on after the demise of its source, serving diverse symbolic functions of comfort and authority in ordinary and royal living; so also is the wish of Pa. Noserime for his offspring that, they take after him professionally and even surpasses his achievement. With this background, after raising his children in the way of the Lord, it is only natural that one or two of them take after him, little wonder why (Rukeme and Ejiroghene) two of his nine progenies took after him, corroborating a saying in native Yoruba;

Omo ti ekun ba bi,

Ekun, ni jo.

The child that a lion birthed,

Lion, he shall resemble.

Apparently the duo, Rukeme [11,1] and Ejiroghene are product of a lion that doubles as creative and as such creative-lion they are; they are quintessentially their father’s pride amidst their siblings. This trait made them the toast of their father as reflected in indigenous expression thus;

Omo o le jo baba, ka ma binu omo

Rukeme ati Ejiroghene yi jo baba won ju

Omo o le jo baba, ka ma binu omo

A child cannot resemble his father and engage in spiting the child

Rukeme and Ejiroghene semblance of their father is apparently obvious

A child cannot resemble his father and engage in spiting the child

The above analogy is premised on semblance; a concept entrenched in Yoruba birth right, which gave credence to child’s physical/facial semblance with father as the logical guarantee to paternity and paternal inheritances. Similarly, paternal semblance of a child to a very large extent has hitherto calm family lineage nerves particularly, nucleus legitimizing peace and tranquility in homes. Interestingly, the trajectory of

semblance in traditional Black African homes transcends facial resemblance, but further encapsulate spiritual, moral, material and professional traits, has evident in the lives of Rukeme and Ejirogene. Though, the duo of Rukeme and Ejirogene Noserime are accomplished artists in their individual right; Rukeme's vintage cum vantage position, stand him out; a trait that justifies study of his artistic prowess which circumnavigates family, schooling, training, practice, accomplishments and works.

2. Training, Growth and Stardom

Rukeme, like every normal child of his time did not start formal education until he was nine years old. (note 2) A journey he commenced, precisely at L.C.C. Municipal Primary School (now Fadeyi Primary School) Onayade Street, Fadeyi Lagos state, Nigeria between 1967 and 1972. He later proceeded to Igbobi College, Igbobi in Yaba area of Lagos state, Nigeria for his secondary school education between 1972 and 1976. He subsequently had his HSC/A-Level Sciences (Physics, Chemistry and Biology option) at the Federal Government College, Ilorin Nigeria between 1972 and 1979 courtesy of his father's transfer to the aforementioned college [9] Though, Rukeme was a science student, his love for Visual arts was apparent considering his family background and passing it at his West Africa Examination Council's (WAEC) O'Level result with distinction (A).

The latter feat is coupled and traceable to the sound tutelage he received from his Fine art teachers who identified his skills in art early and also encouraged him to pursue a career in art. There is no doubt that the artistic insight and simplistic guidance of his teachers kept him unusually informed about the striking happenings in the world of art; an unwavering passion, which waxed stronger by the day. As such, Rukeme was already well-resourced artistically before heading to Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, Kaduna state, in 1981 for his Bachelor's degree. Worthy of note, is the fact that, he was admitted into Zaria art school, department of Fine Arts twenty five years after his father's graduation [7]. The serene cordiality between the town and gown at ABU, makes it conducive for teaching and learning regardless of the rigor and vigor of formal art training both mentally and physically. At the School, he was put through the dual fundamentals of academic methods (tradition and modern) in drawing and painting as surmised thus [13];

...Academic tradition exalts... the organic structure and unity of the model [human body]... viewed and painted with respect, without detachment or a sardonic air of superiority on the part of the artist... [Otherwise known as] mimesis, or the imitation of nature. Imitation of nature was the motto which recurred again and again in all Renaissance treatises..., [which]... is mechanical and inimical to self-expression... Illusionism was a radical variant of ...empiricism in art which ...sought inspiration ...in immediate experience and observation. ...drawing classes... allowed [students] to draw [and paint] approximate section of bodies and ... accept multiple test lines and accidents without correcting or erasing them. A persistent modern view holds that there are no mistakes in a work of art. The only criterion is the artist's intention. Careful academic practices not only develop patience but also train the student to see mistakes and correct them. In addition ... [it] urges student to make continuous reference to nature in order to avoid excessive personal expression or mannerisms (maniera).

The above views on academic tradition and modernity are true culmination of the training at the Zaria art school where Rukeme and conglomeration of other attendees are better for it, with evidential mastery of optics laws; which recognized accuracy and finishing and encouraged diverse expressionistic mannerism as observed in grandaunts work of art. He bagged a Bachelor of Art (B.A. Hons.) degree, emerging

as one of the outstanding grandaunt of his set with second class upper division in 1985, specializing in Painting [7]. His love for scholasticism made him enrolled for a Master's degree in Visual Art History at the Institute of African Studies and Museums, University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1990; a programme he completed in 1991. After due diligence, Rekeme finally agree to pursue a Doctoral (Ph. D) degree in Fine Art, majoring in Painting at the Ogbomoso Art School [14], Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso and completed his final Oral in 2018.

His working experience dated back to 1980, as a supporting staff at the Control Tower of the Federal Ministry of Aviation, Ilorin International Airport, Ilorin, Nigeria. He had a stint at the National Head Quarter, National Youth Service Corp, Surulere, Lagos as a Graphics Artist between 1984 and 1985. For Rukeme, 1985 was a very remarkable year, being the year of his employment as an Assistant Lecturer at the School of Art, Design and Printing Technology, Yaba College of Technology (YabaTech), Yaba, Lagos. And as fate will have it in that same (1985) year, he was saddle with the responsibility of Chief Curator of his godfather's (Professor Yusuf Grillo) Retirement Art Exhibition. The success stories of his 1985 curatorial skills linger on in the hearts of patriots, it consequently led to his official pronouncement as Curator [General] of the Yaba Art School in 1995 [15].

Rukeme was appointed two terms Head of Department of Fine Art for 1996-1998 and 2007-2008; and voted in as Dean, School of Art, Design and Printing Technology for two terms: 1999-2002 and 2009-2012. He rose to the position of a Chief Lecturer in 2002 and emerged winner of the 2003-2004 Students' Affair Deanship race. He later contested for the seat of Rector both at the Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun state and Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos state his home station. In 2013, March 12th to be precise, he delivered the 2nd Inaugural Lecture of the School of Art, Design and Printing Technology, Yaba College of Technology, but the 1st in the series for the Department of Fine Art, at the Main Gallery of the Yaba Art School, Yaba, Lagos Nigeria. (note 3)

His other achievement includes membership of diverse artistic cum professional bodies locally, nationally, continentally and globally, prominent among them are Art Scholars Institution (ASI) Nigeria, Youth Festival on African Heritage, Society of Nigerian Artists (sna), International Association of Artists, Paris and Art Council, African Studies Association (ACASA) USA. Rukeme's consistency in practice is no doubt laudable, having hosted three solo-exhibitions and participated in plethora of joint or group exhibitions locally, nationally and internationally since the last four decades. Youth Experience (1977), Societal Waves (1984) and Nigerianese (2008) were his three solo accomplishments while his group exhibitions are too numerous to mention. (note 4) Rukeme (Figure 1) is married and blessed with children. He is fluent in Urhobo, Yoruba [16] and English languages.

Rukeme is by no small measure a veteran in the field of art, he is a theorist, illustrator, curator, drawer and painter of profound repute [1]. Many of his works adorn the walls of the crème de la crème of Lagos and the nation at large. His works are testimonies to his expressionistic tendency, which is substantiated in the words of scholars below;

Leon Battista Alberti in his 1437 treatise on Painting writes... "If [drawing or] painting aims at depicting visible things, we must first of all notice how one sees things" [17]. Leonardo da Vinci's equally observed that ...the spirit of the painter must be like a

*mirror, which always change to the colour of the object that faces it [18].
Consequently ...a painter ...should never imitate the manner of another, because with regard to art, he will be called grandchild rather than a son of nature. Since natural things exist in such great abundance, one will and should take refuge in these things themselves rather than in the masters who have learnt from them [19], as in... self expression ... meant the emotion or meaning convey by the subject-the person or thing depicted-not the emotional state of the artist [20].*

The above submissions are crystal traits of Rukeme, an expressionist who had over the years paid apt attention to object(s) perception and precision, subjecting them to Horatio's [21] instruction and entertainment principles.



Figure 1. *Self Portrait of Rukeme Ufoma, Noserime, 2020, Post card Photograph, courtesy of the artist.*

3. Practice, Experiment and Mastery

Though he classified himself as a Latent Realist, his works no doubt, are products of environmental, political, social, cultural and economic interest, needs and values, particularly from the Nigerian prisms. Prolific as Rukeme is, only eight caught the fancy of this study of his works, which were shortlisted, or repertoire for interpretation or visualized, based on their philology and historic significance. They are Samaru Village, Maroko Year 2000, Freedom at Last, Idumota, Dignity of Age I, Peace be Still, Reminiscent of Knowledge and Ara: The Mystery and the Talking Drum, rendered in oil, graphite and glucol (glue and colour) they are consequently visualized thus;



Figure 2. *Samaru Village, 1984, Oil on Canvas, 3ft x 4^{1/2}ft.*

The above abstract painting is oil on canvas; a personalistic rendition of *Samaru*, the village that hitherto played and continues to play host to the foremost art school in Nigeria, Hamadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna state. This painting entitled “*SamaruVillage*” juxtaposes the architecture and the people of the town; a vivid caption of its earliest beginning to the present. Its colour scheme is di-chromatic ranging between red and green hue. The architecture is a true reflection of *Samaru*'s tradition and modernity as represented on the foreground (modern Western structures) and the background (a share show of indigenous structures of thatched huts, houses

and the palace. Interestingly the center of this piece play host to several human figures. Two of the figures are massively rendered (guardian angels), presumably positioned as a gate keeper of the village each facing the western and eastern borders of the village. Also significant is the human image at the middle of the composition walking majestically holding what can be likened to a sword, perhaps to ward off impending limitations, apparently resonating illumination from it foot with trajectory impact beyond the earthly borders into the heavens. Further seen are human images in a balloon, an extension of the campus at the central right of the canvas; the images suggest Utopia, scenery where peace and tranquility reigns, not without vigilance though.



Figure 3. *Maroko Year 2000, 1985, Oil on Canvas, 4ft x 3ft.*

The colour scheme of this 1985 master piece is red, black and blue with a mix of neutral white; it is a true reflection on the present and the future of a milieu once known as Maroko. This master piece is segmented into fore-middle-and-back grounds. The foreground showcased a maiden bust, supposedly a water goddess (mermaid) gazing through her prism, the future of a setting, once commoners haven that was raised down for the singular purpose of acquisition, reservation and conversion as aboard for the crème de la crème; a clear show of impunity and gross abuse of power and violation of human right by the military. Maroko 2000 pictured the heinous account of the time and its future. The maiden is presented in a sober mood (facing us directly like it's a fresh happening), supposedly reflecting on the ills of the land. She was adorn in tube (armless gown), curled hair, neck chain and ear rings, her bust traverse the middle ground, capturing the exotic architectural future of Maroko, clad in marble or glaze finish [22], it attendant edifice, seascape and sand fill. The background attested to the raising down of structures. The pallet of this piece is dominantly red, signifying the bloodsheds, black represented the dark state of the period and blue, an indication of later calm, while white symbolized a new dawn.



Figure 4. *Free at Last, 1986, Glucol Panel, 3ft x 4ft.*

This piece is rendered in “Glucol”, a technique innovated by Rukeme, mainly through manipulation of glue and colour, which often giving the impression of an impasto. The Figure 4 is in landscape and it is panelled into three of foreground, middle ground and back ground and its imageries are dry grass, dry tree [23], brown horse and waves or wind. Like the title of the piece “Freedom at Last”, the horse, which is in motion traversing the west of it world, approaching the east in quest of liberty, simply implies triumph over stagnation, limitation and desolation as evident in the apparent dry tree, dry grass vegetation and dry wind. Though the technique adopted is unique to the artist, using monochromatic shade of brown with an iota of blue and white to represent the tides of liberation after several years of hostile retrogression and triumph over invisible powers and principality and spiritual wickedness in high places.



Figure 5. Idumota, 1989, Oil on Canvas, 2ft x 3ft.

This 1989 piece is a true picture of Idumota in its formative flourishing days. It bring to mind different things to different people, perhaps as a result of its cosmopolitanism, it played host to diverse race, culture and endeavours for the singular purpose of commerce being one of the first gate way on the island to the wider-world. The Figure 5 paid premium on the key structures that play prominent role in the life of Idumota starting from Broad Street to the Market to the Water Ways. The Central Mosque though, located near to the Market but is presumably emphasized to take the same level with the skyscraping banks on Broad Street to signify balance of tranquility and equity. Some of the apparent skyscrapers supposedly are First bank, Central bank, defunct Savannah bank and the CMS Book Shope built with bricks [23]. Also evident is the road network of the broad street with its adjoining junctions though, not as apparent as the smaller structures like lockup shops, multipurpose stores and possibly make shift shops or kiosks for buying and sales of ceramic wares [24,25] and all manner of transactions that Idumota is known for. The piece to a very large extent, gave credence to Soder Idumota with what can be likened to Ori-Olokun, signifying the waters goddess of wealth “Aje”; little wonder why the space (Idumota) thrives in commerce and trade. This piece is executed in black, yellow and red colour scheme, giving the impression of warmth and suggesting transactional power play of the locality among it peers.

The style of above master piece is christened Latent Realism and its titled “Dignity of Age I”, which is a testament to graceful aging rendered in soft pencil or charcoal. It showcased an elderly native man, fabulously dressed in traditional Nigerian Hausa Fulani regalia [26]. The shading technique [27] adopted is smoothing, masterly maneuvered to reveal Charosqueros [28]; principle of light and shade, giving the illusion of depth and distance. The image of the elder statesman was designed to cover

the entire canvas leaving very little space for the background images, which revealed a thatched hut. The man is adorned in turban headgear, Babariga attire, beaded chains and shepherd stick held by his body and an invisible left hand, majestically posing with his smoking pot held by his right hand and mouth. Even in his old age, the elder state man is projected youthful, reminiscing on the vicissitude of achievements (good old days) and arguably concentrating on his present.



Figure 6. *Dignity of Age 1*, 1992, Grahite, 3ft x 2ft.



Figure 7. *Peace be Still*, 1997, Oil on Canvas, 3ft x 2ft.

This piece exhibits a colour [28] scheme of black, blue, white, yellow and red and arguably the most tasking to visualized. The painting on its foreground showcased one God, one man and two angelic figures rendered in different dispositions. The man figure is conspicuously rendered while that, of the transcendental being and the angels is made evasive. The man is rendered majorly in red, suggesting the fact that, he is on a cross road and overwhelmed by his situation. Realizing this fact, he bowed or berried his head in supplication to an Omni-potent God at the altar of flowing waters, colourated in blue, yellow and red. The waters flow intersects the jaw of the Omniscience God to its shoulder, watching and aptly listening from a confined space with light at its end and His angels ready to deliver His disposition. The white lighten, resonated from His ear knob, suggesting answer to the man's supplications at the spiritual realm with image of the same man adorned in white triumphantly with raised hands to the heavens. The light is in progressional forms white to blue to blue-white indicating piece, love and tranquility.

This piece is another Latent Realism titled “Reminiscence of knowledge”, in recognition of a thorough bread scholar in person of Professor Wole Soyinka. This title justifies the saying “round peg in side round hole”. The artist place Soyinka at the near middle of the Figure 8facing the west enveloped in a black shadow background, which gives the impression of silhouette horse facing the east. Visually speaking, the direction of the shadow is a reflection of Soyinka's early academic exploit and

activism while his realistic eastward posture is a testimony to his scholastic erudition. Soyinka was rendered as if he was delivering an inaugural speech; a report of his scholastic stewardship though, adorn in conventional round neck shirt (Buba). Also worthy of note is the fact that, the silhouette horse gives the combined illusion of a flipped book and a house or a granary. By implication Soyinka erudition is an open book that will continue to be read by contemporary generation and generations yet unborn while the house is an indication of the immense strength, agility, vigour and wealth of knowledge Soyinka is endowed with particularly from the Language cum Linguistic and activism point of view.



Figure 8. Reminiscent of Knowledge, 2005, Graphite, 3ft x 2ft.

Ara: the mystery and the talking drum captured a young lady in her late twenties or better still in her early thirties posed in a fabulously stylish dress in contemporary personalised manner. *Ara* is the lady's stage name; this damsel is adorned in long braided hairdo. Her both hands suspended some strands of her braid while the rest of the braid dropped to her knee, her body is posed to the west and her face is tilted frontally gazing at us, like it is her time to shine a bright future ahead of her, she had the talking drum hung to her waist, the symbol of her trade. She is rendered in a pose suggesting her caption at a Red Carpet by paparazzi. The background shows a village scene that play host to two thatched houses made from green brick or shape wall [29], which may imply her humble beginning, rendered in Latent Realism.



Figure 9. Ara, The Mystery and the Talking Drum, 2006, Graphite, 3ft x 2ft.

4. Conclusions

B'ina ku
Afi eru boju
Bi ogede ku
Afi omo e rupo

When fire dies

It engages soot in covering its face

When plantain dies

It uses its offspring as replacement

Like the above maxim, which recognized genealogical lines, Rukeme is from the lineage of an artist, precisely the stock of Pa. Noserime John Thomas, one of the foremost art graduates of the Zaria Art School and a renowned art Educationist. Rukeme's zest for creative ingenuity can be associated with the Yoruba epigram below;

Bibire, ose fowo ra, oye ka wi

Bibire, ose fowo ra oye ka so

Bi abini koto ka tun ra eni bi

E wo Rukeme omo Nosarime olona

Oku bibire

Good birth, cannot be bought with money we should say

Good birth, cannot be bought with money we should voice out

The manner of our birth cannot be compared with our rebirth

Behold Rukeme the son of Noserime an artist

Weldon, for good birth.

Though, the above epigrammatic lines touched on birth quality, it equally emphasized renaissance [30], which is the thrust of Rukeme's upbringing, training and practice. His practice however, is distinguished not only by his experimental accomplishments (Latent-Realism, Glucol and Nilism) but by bagging the highest academic degree (Ph. D) in Fine Art (Painting), from Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho Nigeria. Consequently, the visualisation of Rukeme's works is clear testament to his experiences and understanding of the socio-cultural history of his milieu, which is crystallised by Schneider [30] thus;

...the function of the depicted objects [drawing or painting] ... is not merely a matter of cultural history, but they also bear witness to changes in people's awareness and mentality. They teach us, sometimes very directly and sometimes rather more inconspicuously and implicitly, about historical changes in attitudes towards the capabilities of human perception, transformations in man's awareness...

Visually speaking, the works repertoire are prisms from which Dr. Rukeme helped prospective audience to gaze into Nigeria's ages past, refreshing their perceptual and awareness capacity, socially, politically, economically, communally, individually, heroically and educationally. This feat however, is a challenge and a clarion call to practicing and upcoming artists in engaging in sociological documentation of their milieu.

Notes:

1. Noserime Ufoma Rukeme. 2020. *Curriculum Vitae. Revised Version*, p. 2.

2. *The norm in the 1960s and late 1970s physical maturity prevailed over mental maturity as such, prospective pupil enrolling for primary education are mandated to be physically mature (Ages nine to twelve was standard). Pupils are mandated to pass the popular physical test, which*

was by *cris-crossing one's right hand over one's head to touch his or her left ear. Failure to pass the test is denial of formal education; this is not to say that there are no exceptions though.*

3. CV. 2020. pp. 3-4.

4. CV. 2020. pp. 5-8.

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