

Emergence and Development of Painting in Formal Art Schools in Nigeria

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Received: 1 August 2023; **Accepted:** 24 August 2023; **Published:** 21 September 2023

Abstract:

Paintings of excellent artistic qualities were produced in Nigerian art institutions. In spite of their artistic merits, these paintings have received relatively less scholarly attention and documentation. Moreover, studies on emergence and development of painting in Nigeria are scanty and have not attracted scholars' interest. The scholarly inadequacy is due to over concentration on plastic arts at the expense of other art forms. Instances where this art tradition has been reported and recorded, systematic and detailed studies have not been initiated [1]. Descriptive method was adopted for the study. The data were pulled out from the art institutions defined as universities and polytechnics across the study area, Nigeria. The paper observes that painting in Nigeria manifests in various forms and has phases of development. Development in painting in Nigeria is hinged on the following factors: culture, contact with the British Colonial authorities, materials, styles, establishment of more art institutions, artistic revolution of the Zaria artists through the concept of "Natural Synthesis", agitation for freedom in all facets of life which includes freedom of expression in art practice and economy. Against this background, the paper addresses emergence and development of paintings, vis-a-vis factors responsible for their development in various formal art institutions within the three geographical zones in Nigeria.

Keywords:

Painting, Development

1. Introduction

Painting as an art form is practiced in art institutions in Nigeria. It is invariably included in Fine and Applied Arts as well as Creative Art Programmes with structured curricula to train academic and professional artists. The formal art schools comprise academic institutions, patterned after Western norms of regular schooling [2, 3, 4]. Scholars in their various researches have integrated, explored and published on art schools in Nigeria. Filani [3] traces the history of origin, transition and development of Nigerian art from 'traditional' to 'contemporary' period. Adepegba [5] explores the death of traditions and the birth of new forms in Nigerian art. Folarin [6] discusses the genesis of modern Nigerian art. Chukuegu [7] examines the origin and development

of art in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Akande and Makinde [8] highlight the probable date of origin and philosophy of the Ona art movement. Ademola [9] identifies the roles and influences of Ife art graduates on Adeyemi College Art School. Ecoma [10] and Nnadozie [11] examine the philosophy of origin, structure, genealogy of graduates, identity, development, influences, prospects and challenges of the Nsukka Art school. Jari [12] raises the rationale to establish the validity of existence of many schools of art. However, as good as these studies are and as rich as the literature materials are, those on art schools were not directly on emergence and development of paintings in formal art schools in Nigeria. So, this research is of high significance.

Moreover, since the establishment of formal art schools in Nigeria, paintings were produced at various historical periods under different ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Painting in Nigeria is rich and possesses excellent artistic merits. As a result of these artistic merits, scholarship of this art genre in Nigeria is expected to be rich. However, painting as an artistic practice in Nigeria has received relatively less scholarly attention, study and documentation in spite of their artistic merits. Studies on emergency and development of painting in Nigeria have also received less study and documentation. Scholarship on emergence and development of painting in formal art school in Nigeria is scanty. The scholarly inadequacy is due to over concentration on plastic arts at the expense of other art forms. There is also lack of relevant comprehensive publication on the subject creating a significant gap in the body of knowledge on development of painting in formal art schools in Nigeria. In instances where this art tradition has been reported and recorded, systematic and detailed studies have not been initiated [1]. The result therefore is neglect in scholastic inquiry which has negatively affected a proper appreciation of the development of the art forms [13]. Against the foregoing backgrounds, this paper studied the emergence and development of paintings in Nigeria.

The study examines emergence and development of painting in formal art schools in Nigeria. It identifies development in paintings produced by artists from different Nigerian art schools overtime. It also highlighted the socio-cultural, economic and political factors that gave birth to or influence painting development in Nigerian art institutions. Against this background, painting among the people in various kingdoms in the pre-colonial Nigeria era was discussed.

Descriptive method was adopted for the study. In geographical scope, the study area is Nigeria while tertiary institutions as defined as universities and polytechnic stratified into three (3) spatial levels of north, middle belt and southern zone constitute the formal art schools from which the data were pulled. The research depends solely on primary and secondary sources of data such as the artist, art schools, paintings, museums, art galleries, bibliographical materials such as exhibition catalogues and books. Data for the study were collected through resource centers over a period of eight years. Resource centres which constituted viable secondary sources of information for the study are libraries, museums, art galleries and private collections. They provide relevant information through published textbooks, journal articles, art exhibition catalogues, encyclopedia, magazines, newspapers, unpublished theses/dissertations. Oral information was sourced from art stakeholders who served as key informants. Some of the data collecting instruments used to gather and record paintings produced by various selected artists were digital camera, scanning machine, measuring tape and internet facilities. Analysis of the development of painting styles was done using qualitative analysis as a parameter.

2. Paintings in Traditional Nigeria

Paintings in the pre-colonial era in Nigeria were purely traditional and manifests in various forms and in different media that were locally sourced through indigenous technology. The paintings then were applied on wall surface, human body and rock shelter which informed rock paintings and engravings, mural and body paintings. The rock paintings, executed on rock surfaces, were practised in Birnin Kudu and Geji near Bauchi and Kano and among the Marghi of North Eastern Nigeria as well as in Igbeti in South Western Nigeria [14,15,16,17]. Fagg's stylistic classification of the paintings has identified two main styles: those in solid colours and those represented in outlines. Paintings in Geji are also in two styles: naturalistic pictures and simple diagrams [17] (Figures 1-2).



Figure 1. *Geji Rock Painting of a Hornless Cow. Samuila [18]*

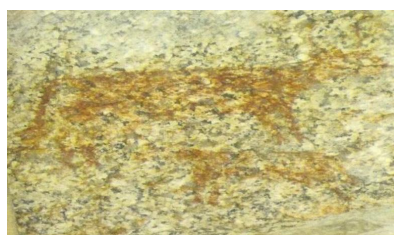


Figure 2. *Painting of cows and calves in a rock shelter at the Shira site, Birnin Kudu. Mangut and Mangut [19]*



Figure 3. *Marghi Rock Painting (www.visualphotos.com, 2016)*

Rock paintings among the Marghi, which partly serves ritual purpose for an initiation or a betrothal rite ranges in sizes from three to over eighteen inches [16,17]. They are stick representations of different subjects including names of individuals (Figure 3). Rock paintings in Igbeti which is associated with Iya Mapo, the goddess of woman occupations do not show any recognizable object. Those of Igbara-Oke are a fish-like shape, a triangle and other geometric designs [17].

Mural paintings are found among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria on walls, walls of shrines, houses and palaces (figures 4-5) [20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30]. Mural paintings are also practised among the Igbo of the South Eastern Nigeria.

Body paintings is practised among various ethnic groups in Nigeria; Yoruba, Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani and Igbo [31]. It is associated with women and commonly found on them during wedding and religious festivities [32]. It is an expression of beauty and indication of age, title, social status, and membership of any revered group in the society. It is an art of beautifying the body especially the leg, face, nose, eye and finger among other parts of the body (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 4. *Adegoke Waidi,*



Figure 5. *Asere Olusegun,*



Figure 6. *A Henna Body*



Figure 7. *Laolu Senbanjo, Yoruba Sacred Art of the Ori. (Artist*

Adegboro, 1986, Igboho Shrine, Oyo State, 45cm x 130cm. Abokede [27]

Adegboloro, 1989, Asu's Compound, Sepeteri, Oyo State, 150cm x 220cm. Abokede [28]

Decoration (Apollos, 2011).

archives - <http://www.laolu.nyc/ritual-face-art>, 2016).

3. Paintings in Modern Nigeria

Apart from the traditional form of painting, the earliest effort and indeed another phase in the evolution of Nigerian art which is largely from formal art schools. Modern painting in Nigeria originated from Aina Onabolu (1882-1963). He started as a self-trained artist by copying pictures from books and magazines using naturalism style [33]. He was also the pioneer artist who started landscape and figural painting (figures 9-10) in Nigeria. The aim is to dis-abuse the mind of Europeans who opines that Africans cannot produce naturalistic paintings [34]. He was the first formally trained modern Nigerian artist and first art teacher who challenged the negative perception and colonianist dogma that Africans were incapable of mimetic representation in art [35]. Hitherto, abstraction was associated with traditional art and was regarded as primitive, fetish and idolatory. He rejected the colonialist perception that described Africans as “uncivilized natives” mentally incapable of mastering science and arts that constituted the foundations of Western civilization [35]. Onabolu's paintings disprove the assertion, and demonstrated that naturalism was not the monopoly of Western artists [36]. Portraiture was his forte, a genre he regarded as the most technically exacting for an artist. His portraiture is characterized by European academic formalism stressing technical competence, accuracy in anatomical details, balance and proportion. He was a portraitist painter who saw the world as it were, through the eye of the camera [37, 38]. His portraits immortalized leading social figures of his time such as Dr. Sapara (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Aina Onabolu, *Portrait of Chief (Dr.) Sapara Willams*, Oil on Canvas, 90cm x 69cm. *The Nucleus [39]*

The newly acquired representational competence is undoubtedly a mark of modernity and development. He designed the first Nigerian art curriculum for secondary schools and adopted European artistic conventions [7]. He also introduced painting to a formal school curriculum at the secondary level. At the formal and informal art schools, easel painting in form of figure paintings, still-life paintings, portrait paintings, landscape paintings, seascape paintings, painting composition, mural paintings and mixed-media paintings abound. Technically, it was Aina Onabolu's painting style that dominated the Nigerian art scene between the period of 1900-1960 [33].



Figure 9. Aina Onabolu, *Portrait of Sisi Nurse*, 1922, Oil on Canvas, 64cm x 41cm. AHM&CAE Catalogue [40]



Figure 10. Aina Onabolu, *Portrait of a Man*, 1995, Water Colour on Board, 48.5cm x 38.5cm. AHM&CAE Catalogue [41]

Akinola Olasekan (1916-1963) and other Nigerian artist such as Eke Okeybolu (1916-1958) and J.D. Akeredolu were inspired by Aina Onabolu who depicted traditional representational art of naturalistic images and technical competence re-emphasized by the laws of perspective and anatomical accuracy (Figures 11-12) [42].



Figure 11. Akinola Olasekan, *Dancers*, 1944, Oil on Board, 650cm x 458cm.

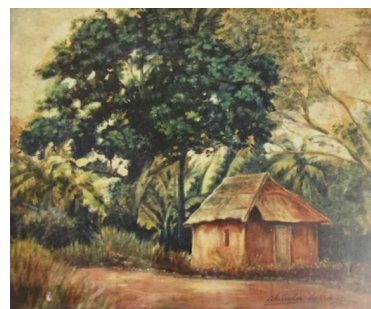


Figure 12. Akinola Olasekan, *Elefon Shrine*, 1967, Oil on Canvas, 40.6 x 51cm.

Source: <http://africanartswithtaj.blogspot.com>, 2016)

Another development in the study of painting in Nigeria was the marriage of European art to the Nigerian art tradition. Two factors responsible for the sudden creative awareness and merger are The Kenneth Murray and the activities of the Zaria Art Society. Painting orientation and style changed when Kenneth Murray (1902-1972) arrived Nigeria as an art teacher at the instance of Aina Onabolu in 1928. Kenneth Murray believed that art needed to relate with time and environment if it was to be meaningful to the people. Murray objected cultural intolerance and oppression the Nigerian art and other traditional values were subjected to by colonial powers and encouraged the young artists to develop their talents in line with their culture. As a form of gradual departure from the Aina Onabolu's concept of naturalism, he introduced an art education programme hinged on Nigerian culture and tradition. He studied the art, culture and tradition of the major ethnic groups in the country and thereafter designed a new art syllabus for Nigerian schools. From then on, it became the springboard of the development for contemporary art in Nigeria. The result was that he produced what is today regarded as the first generation of contemporary artists in the country.

Efforts of these two principal figures led to Onabolu and Murray art schools. Prominent among students under Murray art school is Ben Enwonwu [43]. Enwonwu's paintings demonstrated development of two divergent styles. The earlier paintings reflected a mimetic style while he used symbolic and elongated forms in the

latter works. So, his paintings reflect naturalistic and stylized forms which he called “African Style” [35]. Enwonwu’s *girls in waiting* (Figure 13) is an example of his paintings on mimetic style. Other style is evident in his late canvases of paintings such as *Aghogho Mmo* and *African Dancers* series (Figures 14 and 15). It is worth mentioning that the naturalistic trend of the early pioneers was infiltrated by consciousness of the aesthetic value of Nigerian traditional form.

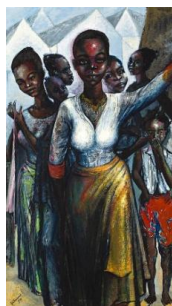


Figure 13. Ben Enwonwu, *Girls in Waiting*, 1959, Oil on Canvas, 105cm x 114cm.



Figure 14. Ben Enwonwu, *Aghogho Mmo*, 1972, Oil on Canvas, 105cm x 114cm.

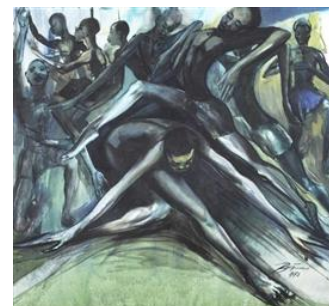


Figure 15. Ben Enwonwu, *African Dances*, 1973, Oil on Canvas, 105cm x 114cm.

Source: www.mutualart.com

4. Painting Development in Formal Art Schools

Contact with British colonial authorities has greatly influenced the art of painting in the pre-colonial period. It ushered formal and non-formal art training with specific reference to painting practice. Departments of Fine and Applied Arts were established at the higher institution level and painting was introduced into their curricula. Artist from these various art institutions produced painting as directed or dictated by the curriculum. The genres of paintings produced in formal art institutions in Nigeria are diverse. The materials and subjects of the paintings are also diverse. The practitioners are also of divergent artistic backgrounds: formal trained painters, informal schools trained painters, and self taught painters.

Since art was introduced into formal art school curriculum in Nigeria, painting as an art form has not been static. Its development is in various ways such as materials, styles and formation of more art institutions. Initially, painting media in Nigeria was dominated by the expensive imported materials such as oil paint, water colour, acrylic paint and pastel among others. Since the Zarianist established the idea of “Natural Synthesis”, indigenous materials have been added to painting media.

Painting in formal art school in Nigeria commenced with naturalism by the pioneer Nigerian artist Aina Onabolu. Kenneth Murray’s arrival led to the introduction of indigenous forms into painting. The result was that the artists began to stylize their art forms while folklore became conceptualized in painting. Later, painters expressed themselves in various other styles such as cubism, abstraction and expressionism, symbolism, stylization and impressionism (Figures 14 and 15).

Establishment of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology now Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria mark another development of style in painting in Nigeria. The institution established in 1952 by British Colonial government initially modeled its art curriculum including painting on the British School system. There was artistic revolution against the curriculum due to dissatisfaction with the western art

curriculum and its formalistic orientation. Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yusuf Grillo, Demas Nwoko, Simon Okeke among others formed a group called the Zaria Art society. The principal aim was rediscovering of the traditional art of Nigeria and its incorporation into the academic curriculum. The ideology that emerged from this effort was hinged on the concept of Natural Synthesis, an integration of cultural values, motifs, concept and techniques in the conceptualization of art with western ideas. It should be noted however, that the idea of Natural Synthesis was inspired by the innovations of Ben Enwonwu, whose paintings stressed the fusion of Igbo and European cultures through which he produced unique forms of modern African art. Today, this art school has produced artist of repute with styles reflecting indigenous cultures while some still reflects the natural synthesis styles. The members of Zaria Arts Society produced paintings that were characterized to a large extent by individualism in various styles and techniques which constituted a complete break with the art of the early period, thereby creating a new trend in the development of Art in Nigeria [33]. The Zaria school has produced reputable painters with distinct paintings styles like Yusuf Grillo, Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Rowland Abiodun, Dele Jegede, Gani Odutokun, Shina Yusuf, Kolade Oshinowo, Herry Buhari, Duke Asidere, Emmanuel Inua, Ngozi Rosemary Akande, Abraham Uyovbisere, Oladesu Johnson (Figures 16-18).

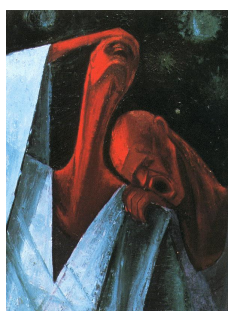


Figure 16. Yusuf Adebayo Grillo (ABU ZARIA), *Mendicants*, ca.1967, Oil on Canvas, 120cm x 60cm. Kennedy [44]



Figure 17. Gani Odutokun (ABU ZARIA), *Friendly Whispers at Sunset*, 1980, Oil on Board, 74cm x 51.5cm. AHM&C Catalogue [45]

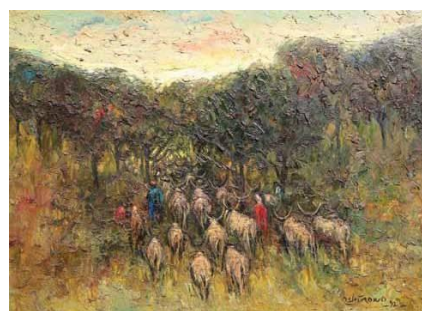


Figure 18. Kolade Oshinowo (ABU ZARIA), *Cattle Rearing*, Oil on Board, 1992, 86.5cm x 117cm. AHM&C Catalogue [45]

Department of Arts and Design, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos established in 1952/53 was the second formal art school in Nigeria. The appointment of graduates of Ahmadu Bello University (Yusuf Grillo and Kolade Oshinowo) as a staff of this art school has influenced several painters such as Abiodun Olaku, Mike Omoighe, Segun Adejumo, Lara Jacks-Ige, and Edosa Oguigo whose paintings are shown below (Figures 19-21).



Figure 19. Lara Jacks Ige (YABATECH), *Gathering*, Ugwan-Rubu, Zaria, 1994, 26cm x 30cm. Onyema[35]



Figure 20. Abiodun Olaku (YABATECH), *The Guard*, 2005, Oil on Canvas, 45.7cm x 30.4cm. October Rain [46]

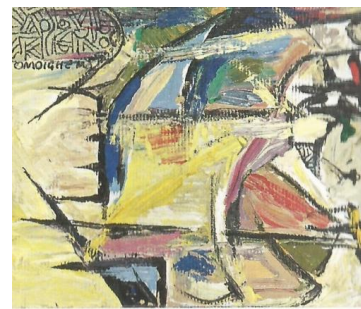


Figure 21. Mike Omoighe (YABATECH), *Inukpukpe Festival*, 2014, Mixed Media on Canvas, 10cm x 12cm. Luciano [47]

After the graduation of the first members of the Zaria Art society, they spread to numerous universities throughout Nigeria where they all created important art education programmes that influenced several generations of post-colonial Nigerian artists. The Fine Arts Department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established in 1962. Uche Okeke joined the department in 1970 after the civil war and his influence on this art institution is quite obvious. He introduced the concept of Natural Synthensis using the Igbo traditional art of body and wall painting, uli as basis of visual experiment. Some of the products of this art school are Tayo Adenaike, Obiora Udechukwu, Uche Edochie, Nneka Odoh, Anthony Nsorfor, Kryz Ikwuemesi C., and Olu Oguibe among others. Paintings of artists from this art school are shown below (Figures 22-24).



Figure 22. Obiora Udechukwu (NSUKKA), *In the Beginning*, 2005, Watercolour on Canvas, 50cm x 32.5cm Luciano [48]



Figure 23. Adenaike Tayo (NSUKKA), *The Mighty Fish that the World could not Devour*, 2007 Watercolour, on Paper, 45.7cm x 61cm. Onyema [35]



Figure 24. Nneka Odoh (NSUKKA), *Thoughts*, 2009, Acrylic on Canvas, 71cm x 91cm. Voices from Within [49]

Ife art school comprises of graduates of the Department at University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) established in 1968. Painters of repute from this art school are Moyo Okediji, Razaq Olatunde Rom Kalilu, Moyosore Ogundipe, Don Akatapo, Victor Ekpuk, Kunle Filani, Adetola Wewe, Stephen Folaranmi and Mufu Onifade, Oladiipo Naomi among others. Few works of product of this art school are in Figures 25-27.

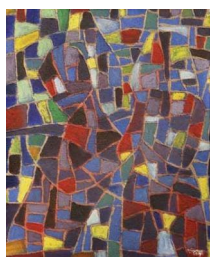


Figure 25. Adetola Wewe (OAU IFE), *Family tree*, 2009, Acrylic on Canvas, 74.5cm x 61cm. AHM&C Catalogue [50]



Figure 26. Folaranmi Steve (OAU IFE). *Family*, 2008, Acrylic and Soil on Board, 60cm x 80cm. *Unity in Diversity* [51]



Figure 27. Victor Ekpuk (OAU IFE), *The Hunter*, 2000, Acrylic on Canvas, 100cm x 100cm. (Artist Archive, 2016)

Auchi art school was established in 1974. The school is known for lavish usage of colours to express mood. Prominent among the painters of the school are Sam Ovrati, Alex Nwokolo, Olu Ajayi, Ben Osaghe and Klarance Okhide among others which their paintings reflect in Figures 28-30.



Figure 28. Alex Nwokolo (AUCHI POLY), *Aso-Ebi*, 2006, Oil on Canvas, 86.4cm x 86.4cm. *October Rain* [46]



Figure 29. Ovrati Sam (AUCHI POLY), *Have Dominion, Not Over Women*, 2014, Acrylic on Canvas, 100cm x 180cm. *A New Order Catalogue* [52]



Figure 30. Klaranze Okhide (AUCHI POLY), *Bring Back Our Girls*, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 10cm x 12cm. *Luciano* [47]

Benin art school was established in 1975. Some painters from Benin art school are El-Dragg Leonard Okwoji, Ifeoma Anyaeji, Spencer Marc-Ejere, Akinwale Onipede, Esimike Uchebuike Roland, and Ebenezer Akinola. Paintings from Benin art school are in Figures 31-33.

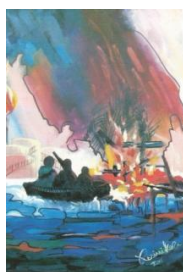


Figure 31. Esimike U. Roland (UNIBEN), *By Fire by Force*, 2011, Oil on Canvas, 95cm x 120cm. *Visual Symphony* [53]

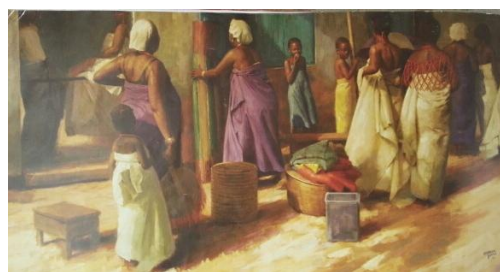


Figure 32. Ebenezer Akinola (UNIBEN), *Towards the Kings Palace*, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 111cm x 183cm. *Lasting Impressions* [54]

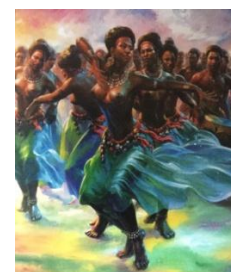


Figure 33. El-Dragg L. Okwoji (UNIBEN), *Green Wingtips*, 2004, Oil on Canvas, 122cm x 122cm. *Onyema* [35]

More art schools were established after 1985. These art schools are departments of Fine and Applied Arts/ Creative Arts/ Fine and Industrial arts in Maiduguri, Akure, Uyo, Portharcourt, Abraka and Ekpoma. Technical colleges such as the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu, the Polytechnic, Ibadan also have good high level of art training programmes [17].

Painting in Nigeria witnessed a radical revolution at the post-colonial era. There were agitations for freedom in all facets of life which include the freedom of expression in art practice. This brought development into Nigerian painting. Paintings produced at the period are individualistic in style. The art style changed from ancient traditions and jettisoning of western realistic style to execution of expressive painting as evidenced in the paintings shown below (<http://africanpainters.blogspot.com.ng>) (Figures 34-42).



Figure 34. Henry Anye (Awka), *Mask*, 2003, Oil on Canvas, 8.25cm x 20cm. (www.absolutearts.com., 2016)



Figure 35. Uzorchukwu Stephen (Awka), *After Today*, 2012, Oil on Canvas, 121cm x 121cm. Signature-beyond Gallery [55]



Figure 36. Muoneme Izuchukwu (Awka), *Homage*, 2014, Acrylic on Canvas, 10cm x 12cm. Luciano B. [48]

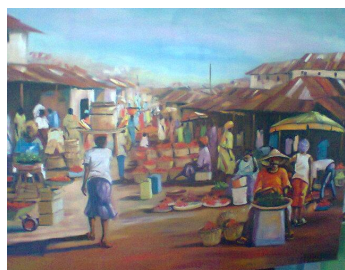


Figure 37. Adetunji O. Johnson (LAUTECH), *Karakata*, 2010, Oil on Canvas, 90cm x 120cm (Courtesy of the artist, 2016)



Figure 38. Akinyemi Ayo (LAUTECH), *Riders*, 2013, Oil on Canvas, 120cm x 120cm. (Courtesy of the artist, 2016)



Figure 39. Adekunle Tobi (LAUTECH), *Dr. (Mrs.) Areo*, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 60cm x 90cm. (Courtesy of the artist, 2016)



Figure 40. Obi Ekwenchi, *Rhythm from the Spirit World*, 1987, Pastel on Paper, 65cm



Figure 41. Joe Musa, *Alice*, 1987, Pastel on Paper, 65cm



Figure 42. Ben Osaghae, *Pay Toilet*, 2008, Oil on Canvas,

2004, *Oil on Canvas, 91.5cm x 122cm. Onyema [35]*

x 75cm. joemusa recent works [56]

117cm x 117cm. (Artist Archive, 2016)

5. Conclusions

Painting practice in Nigeria is neither restricted to artists in formal art schools alone nor terminated from the schools. It has also extended beyond formal art schools. Some painters after their respective trainings from formal art schools sometimes choose to be self-employed as full-time studio artists who run personal studio/ gallery. There are others being employed by museum and gallery owners. These categories of artists experiment, produce paintings for sale, organize and participate in art exhibitions within and outside Nigeria. In most cases, they also have art patrons who promote, acquire and purchase their paintings. Examples of such painters are Ebenezer Akinola, Abiodun Olaku and Victor Ekpuk to mention but a few.

Another category of Nigerian painters were also employed by various art schools as full-time lecturers. In another instance, some engage in combining teaching, research and studio easel painting. Tobenna Okwuessa, El-Dragg Leornard Okwoju, Esimike Uchebuike Roland, Haruna Charles, Joshua Aondona Aviv, Nwafor Okechukwu Charles, Mike Omoighe and Steve Folaranmi are examples of painters who took to lecturing in various Nigerian art institutions. However, development of paintings in formal art institutions in Nigeria is influenced by certain factors such as the patrons, materials, culture, and economy.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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