

**CREATIVITY, PROFESSIONALISM AND FUNCTIONALITY
IN THE WORKS OF MUFU ONIFADE, FROM 1992 - 2012**

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OZOKERAHA, AKPOWOWO BENSANDY
PG/Ph.D/10/57906

**DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

FEBRUARY, 2014

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**THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE
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**DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS
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CERTIFICATION

Ozokeraha, Akpowowo Bensandy, a postgraduate student in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with registration number PG/Ph.D/10/57906, has satisfactorily completed the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D) in Art History. The work embodied in this thesis is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any Diploma or Degree of this or any other University.

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Supervisor

Dr. V. E. Ali
Ag. Head of Department

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

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DEDICATION

To

Late Oreroma Omonabe Ozokeraha, nee Atayenbe,
my mother, who had sound traditional education, saw the value of Western education and
advised me early in life to respect a teacher and obtain it.

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ABSTRACT

Artists evolve technicalities and styles in visual arts, which result not only in creative excellence but also in serious critical discussion. Such discussions evaluate the visual arts and artists in the context of aesthetic and artistic judgment. However, the critical discussion on artistic judgment and its documentation in Nigeria appears to favour only the pioneers of modern Nigerian art, thereby leaving out the budding artists, like Mufu Onifade, who are equally creative and versatile in some areas of visual arts. Mufu Onifade has been charting and developing freely his own artistic direction and personal vision, leading to a highly creative, intellectual and professional identity. His art discourses epitomize the profundity of art history, research and ductility of language. To prove the creativity, intellectualism, professionalism and versatility of Mufu Onifade, a painter who invented Ara art style, therefore, this study focuses on his biographical background, the themes and styles of his Araism movement, the colour influence on his followers and the functions of his paintings and critical writings. The study also locates the indigenous nature of his motifs, his contribution to art criticism in Nigeria and presents the factors that make him versatile as an artist and art critic, covering his selected early works, including drawings and animal skin paintings, but focusing on *Ara* art, which includes his paintings and those of his disciples from 1992 to 2012. Finally, the research acknowledges and documents Mufu Onifade's great creative excellence and versatility in some areas of visual arts. In this regard, the research strives to bridge the gap in acknowledgement and documentation between the pioneer artists of modern Nigerian art and the budding ones, hoping to inspire further studies, particularly on Araism Movement, and thereby promote indigenous artistic language.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background Study

Over the years, artists have evolved technicalities and styles that lead to creative excellence in visual arts. Such styles have invariably been attracting much discussion, evaluation or critical reflection on the visual arts and artists in the context of aesthetic and artistic judgment. Humanity sees aesthetics from three major angles: As a branch of philosophy, which studies the nature of art, taste and beauty, including creation and appreciation of beauty¹, and as science, which is the study of sensory values or as judgments of sentiments and taste and, as critical evaluation.² In a more broad sense, academics perceive aesthetics as critical evaluation on art, culture and nature.³ On artistic judgment, many art movements have divided art criticism into different areas with different criteria for their judgment. Common in the division of art criticism are historical criticism and evaluation and contemporary criticism of work by living artists, pursuing a rational basis for art appreciation.⁴

The third sense of aesthetics and the common divisions are pertinent to this study. From the above, therefore, critical judgments have reemphasized and reinvigorated the emergence of stylistic homogeneity in art and has created communes or schools that naturally tugged loyalists for, at times, unexpected diffusion.⁵ Such communes or schools are products of either convictions or principles that either silently or vigorously snubbed any form of creative coercion or compromise.⁶ Historical criticism and evaluation and especially contemporary criticism of works of art have established a rational basis for art appreciation in modern Nigerian art, thereby giving birth to schools,

movements and lately ñismsò. In Nigeria, informal and formal schools and movements began with the triumvirate of Onaboluô School, the Expatriatesô School and the Zaria School. The Onaboluô School uses academic art of naturalism as a model of artistic standard. The Expatriatesô School finds culture an appropriate canvas on which the artist weave visual experience in academics. The Zaria School sees light in the position of Expatriatesô School and consolidated on the synthesis of culture in visual idiom.

Emanating from the schools above are other schools, movements or áismsô such as Nsukka School, Abayomi Barber School, Osogbo School and Ona School or Onaism. Nsukka School originates from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The art school is synonymous with Uche Okeke, who, by 1954, had developed a rich creative, artistic experience and flair for literature. This time, he was already collecting and documenting Igbo folklores and poetic stories, which were harnessed for artistic style that has both national and international recognition. Art critics, art historians and art teachers have greatly acknowledged, popularized and documented these schools/movements/isms and their proponents. An addition to the above schools, movements, or áismsô is another art style called *Ara*.

Ara art is probably the latest with the technique that is comparatively making waive in the art industry. A budding artist of enviable technical and creative excellence, Mufu Onifade, is the proponent and exponent of this *Ara* art. The art style, according to Onifade, in his *Araism Movement 7*, is a ñpainting techniqueò or ñwonder artò.⁷ Onifade experimented *Ara* for seven years before it acquired the status of Araism. Since then, Araism Movement, which lent credence to professional and intellectual activities within and outside Nigeria, has become very popular. Mufu Onifadeô professional and

intellectual contributions to modern Nigerian art, through his *Ara* art and his art criticism experiences, cannot be ignored in contemporary art historical studies. Fig. 1: *Mufu Onifade, artist and exponent of Ara art*, captures the proponent of Ara art style whose creative and professional art experiences are an ideological weapon for a new social order.



Fig. 1: Mufu Onifade, artist and exponent of *Ara* Art, 122 cm x 80 cm, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Having completed experimenting and launching *Ara* art style, its ideology and philosophy began to gain much acceptance among many young painters who began to practise the technique and style and observe its cultural ideological stance. This way, *Ara* art transformed to Araism. In 2006, Onifade, together with his followers, founded Araism Movement, which exhibits the paintings of its members yearly. Earlier in 2002, he founded Ara Studio in Lagos, which he still maintains. Indeed, over forty artists have passed through his informal art school and are now his disciples.⁹ Though, Araism Movement now has fifty registered members, only sixteen have exhibited.¹⁰ Onifade is also a member of many organizations. Some of them are the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), National Society of Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers, U.K.; Association of Nigerian Authors and Arts Writers Organization of Nigeria. He was Secretary, Universal Studios of Art, Lagos and Chairman, National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, Lagos State Chapter.

Mufu Onifade's paintings are currently agitating art critics, and, thereby, creating waives of aesthetic judgment. However, this is one part of his versatility. The media acknowledge Onifade as an artist, curator and a dramatist. Another great aspect of Onifade, other than being an artist, is that he is a committed art critic. These two characters and other harmonious artistic aspects of Mufu Onifade have consistently brought his art and professional experiences to bear on the practical development of the visual art sub sector.¹³

It is important to state here that a critical study of Mufu Onifade's art will help reclaim the Yoruba or Old Oyo high artistic tradition through his bold traditionalization of his *Ara* art. This is saying that Mufu is reclaiming, indirectly, some aspects of the

Yoruba artistic culture that are being neglected. According to Ann B. Dobie, in her *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*, reclamation ñtakes place by remembering history, defining identity, gaining recognition, and celebrating black aestheticsò.¹⁴ She also adds that by this, the art will ñannounce with a strong voice itself as itself, but not a copyò¹⁵ and that doing this, the ñart legitimizes the community it comes from and to some degree can be seen as revolutionaryò.¹⁶

Statement of the Problem

Many modern Nigerian pioneer artists, particularly those of the Zaria Art School, have been greatly acknowledged for their creativity and professionalism in visual arts. Some of these artists are Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Yusuf Grillo. Many of them have been acknowledged and documented in books, journals, newspapers and magazines. Researchers have also focused on them. However, some budding artists who are comparatively endowed with great creative excellence and dynamic versatility in some areas of visual arts have not been acknowledged and documented. A good example is Mufu Onifade, whose experimental art and critical art discourses have not been focused upon. Though many Nigerian newspapers, magazines and exhibition catalogues have featured this artist, the essays on him are vague with no academic energy. This must not continue. It is, therefore, necessary to study this artist as regards the creativity, professionalism and functionality accommodated by his works from 1992 to 2012. This will cover the artistòs art criticism experiences, animal paintings and *Ara* art, including the paintings of his followers.

Objectives of the Study

Very essentially, the research is being undertaken to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To examine the Onifade's biographical background.
- (2) To study his Araism movement thematically and stylistically.
- (3) To locate the indigenous nature of his motifs.
- (4) To examine the colour influence on his followers.
- (5) To present the factors that make him versatile.
- (6) To discuss his contribution to art criticism in Nigeria.
- (7) To examine how his works and critical writings are humanistically functional.

Scope of the Study

The study is limited to Mufu Onifade, an artist and art critic. It covers his early works, including drawing and animal skin painting. However, the research focuses on Onifade's *Ara* art, which includes his paintings and those of his disciples from 1992 to 2012. The study is also concerned with Mufu Onifade's art criticism experiences in Modern Nigerian Art, especially in the tenth decade of this century.

Significance of the Study

This research will be an acknowledgement of Mufu Onifade's great creative excellence and versatility in some areas of visual arts. It will bridge the gap between the modern Nigerian pioneer artists and the budding ones. With this research, Onifade's experimental art and critical attitude would have been well acknowledged. Very significantly, too, the outcome of the research will inspire further studies, particularly on Araism Movement and thereby promote indigenous artistic language. From the

foregoing, therefore, the research will extend the frontier of knowledge in visual arts, art history and art appreciation.

Procedure

The study depends mainly on primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources include oral interviews mainly with Mufu Onifade and his *Ara* art disciples, using camera and a tape recorder. This source also uses private documents, which include diaries, photographs, letters and personal observations of Onifade's *Ara* art. The secondary sources are books, exhibition catalogues, journals, newspapers, magazines and electronic devices, particularly the internet. Unpublished students' projects, seminars/conference papers and proposals also form part of this source.

Limitations

In the course of this research, some problems have emerged. For example, the researcher found it difficult to locate some of Onifade's past paintings that had been collected. The owners of some works did not allow their photographs to be taken, claiming that this would duplicate their original works of art. Mufu Onifade does not know the names of some of the personalities he painted on commission, and all efforts to trace them were abortive. The budget for this research was also overdrawn, due to some exigencies. Dearth of literature that directly focuses on the topic also presented a serious limitation.

Organization

This work is organized into nine chapters. Chapter one introduces Mufu Onifade as an artist and art critic. Literature review makes up chapter two. Chapter three discusses Mufu Onifade's biography. Mufu Onifade's early works makes up chapter four. Chapter

five assesses Mufu Onifade and the birth of Araism. *Ara* disciples of Mufu Onifade forms chapter six. Mufu Onifade: the art critic is in chapter seven. Chapter eight discusses Mufu Onifade's versatility. Finally, chapter nine is conclusion with references and bibliography following.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Little or no academic research has focused directly on the subject of this study, Mufu Onifade, the artist and critic. For this reason, there is dearth of literature on him, apart from few, scattered publications in books, journals, students' projects, art catalogues and newspapers. One of the books is Laurie S. Adams' *Art Across Time*, which partly analyses the traditions that equate artists with gods. It believes that artists and gods are creators; that the former make replicas of nature while the latter make nature itself. ¹ *Art Across Time* is relevant in this review for its characterization of artists; characters that Mufu Onifade also shares.

Kunle Filani: Artist, Critic and Art Administrator by B.A. Ademuleya (et al) gives a detailed account of the 'isms' that emerge in art, artists, art critics and art historians who are intellectuals. To him, from time to time artists, art critics and art historians delineate art into different segments in order to lend credence to the works or to provide a base to understand the works in an era. He adds that artists and art historians over time classify art works into 'isms' that may or may not have clear demarcations from one era to the other.² *Kunle Filani: Artist, Critic and Art Administrator* is relevant to this study for its discussion of artists, art critics and art historians as regards the culture of 'ism' in the development of modern Nigerian art, therefore, *Ara* art.

Some essays are relevant in the book, *Styles, Schools and Movements in Modern Nigerian Art*. These are 'Philosophical and Ideological Triumvirate: Discourse and Styles in Modern Nigerian Art' by Ola Ololade and 'Araism: The Making of a Post-Onaism Movement' by Kehinde Adepegba. In his 'Philosophical and Ideological Triumvirate:

Discourse and Styles in Modern Nigerian Art, Ola Olodi reveals the schools and movements in Nigerian Art. He identifies highly spirited growth and development of modern art in Nigeria and attributes that to 'fecund, cohering and effectual contributions of various formal and informal ideological schools' or styles which, by implication, includes Mufu Onifade's *Ara* art.

Kehinde Adegba's 'Araism: The Making of a Post-Onaism Movement' dissects Araism movement and sees it an offshoot of Onaism with striking similarities between the two styles. To him, Araism is a post-*Onaism* movement, which can even be called *ona ara*, meaning wonderful art, because of some elements of onaism in Araism.⁴ *The Business of Being an Artist* by Daniel Grant assesses artists' characters over time. To him, people believe that as artists get older in practice they become more conventional and reactionary. Condemning this, he says that, in fact, it appears that the opposite is true and that artists become more revolutionary.⁵ This view clearly addresses Mufu Onifade's art career.

In an introduction to his book, *The Nigerian Artists of the Millennium*, D.O. Babalola writes that Nigeria has many artists and art styles and that art and society synchronize. To him, the society reacts to art exhibition differently, depending on the nature of the works of art. Identifying the dynamism between Nigerian artists and the society in modern, post-modern and contemporary Nigeria, he adds that artists continue to make impact on society from the Aina Onabolu's days.⁶ *The Nigerian Artists of the Millennium* is significant in this study for identifying the chronological synergy of art and society such as Mufu Onifade's *Ara* art and society.

Her book, *The Drawing Book* by Sarah Simblet, reveals the significance of drawing to artists. It asserts that drawing occupies a unique place in every artist, adding that drawing is the immediate expression of seeing, thinking and feeling because it is a tool for investigating ideas and recording knowledge.⁷ *The Drawing Book* is important in this review because it establishes the place of drawing in the life of every artist like Mufu Onifade.

After reviewing the scanty books on Onifade, it is now important to review exhibition catalogues, which specifically address *Ara* art, Mufu Onifade and his *Ara* disciples. The exhibition catalogue, *Araism Movement 2*, reveals the controversies that confront *Ara* art. In *Araism Movement 2*, three reviews on *Ara* art reflect these controversies. They are 'Forging ahead with Ara Identity in Contemporary Art' by Kunle Filani, 'Many Disciples, One Character' by Kehinde Adepegba and 'Much Ado about Philosophy' by Mufu Onifade. Kunle Filani reviews *Ara* art on three thematic standpoints: style, technique and followership. On style, Filani considers *Ara* art a style but not a movement, saying that a movement takes philosophical position that drives a group of artists to express a similar belief but with individual features. He asserts that people who are not knowledgeable in aesthetics might confuse method with material and argue that style and movement are the same.⁸ He also asserts that while 'style is outward manifestation of art, movement is sublime and is essentially the way the artists think'.⁹

Kehinde Adepegba's 'Many Disciples, One Character' in *Araism Movement 2* is an overview of *Ara* art and *Araism* movement. The overview holds that *Araism* movement is a group but not a movement, citing three opinions. One opinion is that *Araism* lacks philosophy and ideology, the other believes that *Araism* is a mere artistic

revolution or cultural renaissance; that the exponent is making art profession a unique one, because his disciples practise the same style of art. It asserts, however, that the controversies further stabilize *Ara* art because *Ara* is an art genre and art style that increasingly attracts art scholarship and art discourses.¹⁰ The 'Much Ado about Philosophy' by Mufu Onifade is a declaration of awareness of the controversies that trail *Ara* art. He declares that *Ara* art is not a 'style' but a movement with cultural philosophy and ideological discipline,¹¹ adding that it is spreading fast with followers who have freedom of expression on thematic parlance.¹²

Araism Movement 5, an exhibition catalogue, reviews *Ara* art with five essays: 'A Word from the Gallery' by Sinmidele Ogunsanya, 'Matter Araism' by Abiodun Olakun, 'Araism: Moving at the Movement' by Bunmi Babatunde, 'Dialoguing to Catalogue the Place of Araism and Araism Movement' by Oreoluwa Adedeji and 'Araism Movement 5: Here We Are' by Mufu Onifade. Sinmidele Ogunsanya discloses that Mufu Onifade experimented *Ara* art between 1989 and 1996, that *Ara* is a Yoruba word meaning 'wonder' and 'thunder' and that it is an acronym for aesthetically rich art. It reveals that critics have described *Ara* art as authentic African technique with deep philosophy in African culture. It also describes *Ara* art as a process that involves painting different shades and tones with a palette knife on canvas, resulting in 'a fragmented art work similar to a complex jigsaw puzzle'.¹³ It further reveals that, beginning with Olaniyi Omojuwa in 1990, Mufu Onifade has trained many artists though only a few are members of the movement who are, however, a force to reckon with in a unique style. The review urges people to avail themselves of the exhibition.¹⁴

Abiodun Olaku acknowledges that Ara art style excels because of its competence and mastery, which enable it to build up a base of admirers, patrons and followers. He adds that Ara's strong acknowledgement of Yoruba culture and tradition as well as its technical eloquence and design power are its notable attributes. He contends that Ara as a style seems to descend from the Zaria Art Society and that Ara art style takes an intellectual course in the black man's quest for an identity.¹⁵ Bunmi Babatunde characterizes Ara art in relation to other art styles in the Nigerian art scene. Asserting that other art styles sprang up in the 1980s but fizzled out almost immediately, Babatunde admits that Ara is a stylistic success because of its high experimentation and research. Without indulging in any unnecessary controversy about style and movement, he concludes that Araism is growing fast.¹⁶

Dialoguing to Catalogue the Place of Araism and Araism Movement by Oreoluwa Adedeji is an interview on *Ara* art style. Adedeji interviews the exponent as regards the tenets of *Ara* art style. In response, Onifade reveals that *Ara* art style is a "dogged artistic development from technical exploration and creative composition of tiny units of irregular shapes to create strokes that manifest in shapes and forms that are both aesthetic and meaningful".¹⁷ He adds that the tiny units of irregular shapes are made by "palette knife and are painstakingly arranged to produce forms that have jigsaw puzzle or mosaic effects".¹⁸ He explains that *Ara* connotes technique, contrary to scholars' opinion that it is a style, but *Zarianism*, *Ulism* and *Onaism* connote styles. Maintaining that *Ara* art is a technique, Onifade disagrees with people who criticize Araism that it has no philosophy, that it is an offshoot of Onaism; and then poses questions that further challenge the authenticity of such insinuations.¹⁹ In "Araism Movement 5: Here We

Aje, Mufu Onifade chronicles *Ara* art exhibition from the first edition through the third to the fifth. He features the old and new disciples exhibiting and shows the public the different styles inherent in the technique of Araism.²⁰

Araism Movement 7 reviews *Ara* art with four essays: "Gallery Statement" by Jeff Ajueshi, "Araism: A Booming Art School in Contemporary Nigerian Art Scene" by Ademola Azeez, "Meandering Through the Jurors' Blade" by Bunmi Babatunde and "Araism Movement" by Mufu Onifade. Jeff Ajueshi chronicles the emergence and disappearance of world art styles and movements, beginning with the ones after the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 19th century. Acknowledging the importance of different movements from modern art to post-modernism, Ajueshi reveals that each "consecutive movement was a new avant-garde."²¹ In his defense of Araism as a movement, he asserts that all that come before an "art movement and a common style in the works of member artists characterize an art movement."²² He adds that art critics and the artists sometimes explain the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of a movement through writings and manifestoes respectively. Linking Araism with such world art movements, "Gallery Statement" asserts that Araism movement reinstates its relevance in modern Nigerian art with annual exhibitions of its new creativity and the different styles of its disciplined disciples.²³

Ademola Azeez depicts Onifade as a persistent artist and fighter who uses *Ara* art to fight for space in the Nigerian art scene by bringing to *Ara* a distinctive style with aesthetically pleasing media. Comparing *Ullism* and *Onaism* with Araism, he explains the difference between a school and a movement and asserts that with the type of training Mufu gives to his disciples, Araism should be called a school but not a movement. Azeez

reveals that Onifade argues that Araism is a technique but not a style and enjoins the public not to mind his argument. Finally, he points out some challenges to Araism and then encourages the public to enjoy Araism while it celebrates Nigeria at 50.²⁴

“Meandering Through the Jurors’ Blade” is an account of the jurors/curators of the seventh edition exhibition of *Ara* art. Faced with eighty-eight paintings of the exponent and the disciples to assess and select for the show, the chairman of the panel, Bunmi Babatunde reveals that the jurors’ task was difficult at the background of the controversies facing *Ara* art and the determination to maintain standard by members. He further reveals that the jurors selected forty paintings based on technique, norm-conforming draughtsman ship, tactical form, harmonious colour and various other elements and principles of art. He concludes that the paintings exhibit a high level of value and worth and wishes all participants of Araism Movement another successful outing.²⁵

“Araism Movement” by Mufu Onifade chronicles *Ara* art and Araism movement. Beginning with reference to the launching of Araism movement in 2006 with the paintings of the exponent and his disciples, he discloses the motive of the movement to re-launch the phenomenon of *Ara* to both the artists and the public. He further reveals that Araism serves as a platform to project to the world *Ara* technique and different styles of its members. He explains the Yoruba and Igbo connotations of *Ara* that *Ara* in Yoruba is wonder, thunder, body or skin, and relation and that of Igbo is breast and madness. Onifade also discloses increasing membership of the movement, the technique of *Ara* and reemphasizes that, annually, Araism discovers and projects to the world new creativity and disciplined disciples.²⁶ The work is significant to this study.

Whisper Araism Mufu Onifade is an important publication that reviews Mufu Onifade's *Ara* art solo exhibition in 2010 with seven essays. They are "Gallery Statement" by Oliver Enwonwu, "Araism: The Hallmark of Successful Experimentation and Creativity" by Abdullahi Maku, and "Mufu Onifade and the Many Sidedness of an Artist" by Tunde Babawale. Others are "Letter of Confirmation" by Kate Tarratt Cross, "Araism: A Cultural Renaissance Beyond Whispers" by Margeret Olugbemisola Areo, and "Physiognomy of a Man, his Creativity and Vision" by Adeleye Pam Makanju. There are also "Whisper Araismé Muster the Truth" by Adepegba Kehinde, "The Triangular Mufu" by Olusegun Jide Ajiboye and "Araism: Why Whisper Araism?" by Mufu Onifade.

Oliver Enwonwu's "Gallery Statement" praises the solo exhibition of paintings and Onifade as an artist who exhibits internationally and inspiring wide audiences. He adds that the Omenka Gallery is proud to associate with the exhibition.²⁷ Abdullahi Maku's essay is a catalogue of Araism and Mufu Onifade's artistic success. It reveals how Onifade consistently brings his *Ara* art professional experiences to bear on the practical development of the visual arts and how he has become a "hallmark of successful experimentation, genuine artistic development and refreshing creativity".²⁸

Tunde Babawale mirrors Onifade as one whose name invokes definitive imageries of activism and progressive scholarship, describing him as an artist, critic, playwright, set designer, newspaper columnist, chairman, proponent of Araism, and a man of many parts. He describes *Ara*'s technique as an "expression of stimulation and transformation of cracks made by wax on batik to generate ripples"²⁹ and that this has attracted a considerable followership. The review reveals that Onifade is committed to deriving the

theme of his paintings from his immediate cultural milieu, thereby addressing and promoting universal values through his cultural heritage and then compares him with Bruce Onobrakpeya. He explains further that, with Onifade, the days of the artist as a universal being are back and that Onifade is important to the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) because he intends to promote African culture and civilization through the arts.³⁰

The 'Letter of Confirmation' by Kate Tarratt Cross reveals that Mufu Onifade was a member of the Residency Programme in Aganza. She also describes Onifade's successful demonstration of *Ara* improved technique in the programme.³¹ Margeret Olugbemisola Areo supports Tunde Babawale on Mufu Onifade being a multi-media communicator and adds that he understands his culture, which has become part of him. The review describes the influence of formal and informal stylistic schools and movements in the Nigerian artistic landscape from the triumvirates of Onoboluism, Expatriates and Zaria school through Ulism and Onaism to Araism. Linking Araism with Onaism, Areo believes that Onaism is a big tree, which disperses its seed to germinate into another big tree as Araism and that the latter will also bear seed which will soon be ripe for dispersal. She sees Onifade with his *Ara* art as makers of history, and concludes that 'Great histories are made by very few with small actions, while multitudes stand by, watching.'³¹

Adeleye Pam Makanju's 'Physiognomy of a Man, his Creativity and Vision' also supports the above two views that Mufu Onifade is indeed a man of many parts; a painter, writer, essayist, critic, playwright and an actor. Makanju discusses Onifade's success in his days in the polytechnic and in Araism at national and international levels.³²

In *Whisper Araismé Muster the Truth*, Adepegba Kenhide traces the development of schools and their exponents in modern Nigerian art from Zaria Art Society through Nsukka Art School, Onaism to Araism. He asserts that while those schools emanate from formal art school structures and represent north, east and west respectively, others such as Suzan Wenger's New Sacred Art (1950s), Ulli Beier's Mbari Mbayo (1962-64) and Irein Wangboje's Ori Olokun emerge from workshops and that they provide a good environment for Onaism. He believes that Onaism is a good example of a movement that celebrates tradition and culture. He also believes that Araism stems from Onaism and that the artistic influence of Araism, like wildfire, is spreading everywhere in the country, thereby overwhelming many with its beauty and aura.³³

Olusegun Jide Ajiboye describes Mufu Onifade as a three-sided man: a dramatist, art historian and painter. He reveals that in drama, Onifade travels nationally and internationally acting and that he writes plays and prose, including his roles as Director of Publicity and of chairman of National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, Lagos State Chapter. Ajiboye reveals that Onifade is a force to reckon with in art curatorial services and art criticism, including newspaper art reviews and participation in art seminars. He reveals further that Onifade as a painter, is more of an intellectual and experimentalist who is rich in culture and creativity with his philosophy and style deeply rooted in the Yoruba word *ara*.³⁴ In *Araism: Why Whisper Araism?*, Mufu Onifade chronicles *Ara* art and his participating activities in the Residency Programme at the Greatmore Art Studios, Cape Town, South Africa, between May and July, 2010. He reveals how he successfully executed *Ara* art new technique.³⁵

However, Mufu Onifade's great artistic strides are not limited only to Araism movement; they are also outstanding in his other art associations, especially in Index, which organizes art exhibitions and art symposia. Four critiques have espoused the status of art and artists in the maiden exhibition of Index. The critiques are John Edore's "National Gallery Statement", Bisi Fakeye's "Universal Studios of Art", Kunle Filani's "Indexing the Index" and Mufu Onifade's "Index". In his "National Gallery Statement", John Edore discloses that Index is an assemblage of young modern Nigerian visual artists with varying artistic visions that are taking advantage of the Artist-in-Residence policy of the National Gallery of Art. He reveals their mission, which is to pursue, achieve and demonstrate artistic excellence through an enabling environment. Finally, he commends Index members for their insight, foresight, experimentation and excellence and enjoins them to use the relative vibrancy of their youthfulness to embrace further professionalism, which he sees in the variety of forms and styles in their works.³⁶

Bisi Fakeye's "Universal Studios of Art" is the historical account of the origin, membership and development of Universal Studios of Art, the base of Index group. The critique reveals that Universal Studios of Art, to which Mufu Onifade belongs, forms Index group in addition to running informal training to students. It adds that "master artists" of the studios handle the studios' informal curriculum, which is based on pre-ND, pre-HND and pre-degree programmes. It also adds that the training records a great success.³⁷

Kunle Filani's "Indexing the Index" is an evaluation as well as exhortation of the members of Index. Kunle Filani discloses that the motive of the group is to elevate the status of both the art and artists in Nigeria and that its philosophy is of the index finger

that points to the right direction for other fingers to follow. He acknowledges the challenges of group work and commends the group's effort to raise standard and encourage stylistic and philosophical experimentations. He appeals to the members to observe index-finger symbolism so that they can point to the right way of success. Finally, he advises the members using a Yoruba philosophy that translates, 'If you want to be Osaka, be Osaka. If you want to be Osoko, be Osoko. Why spoil/mix up the two?'³⁸

³⁸ This means that one should be himself.

Mufu Onifade's 'Index' is the statement of the chairman, exhibition committee of the group. It states the group's view on commitment to professionalism or standard with particular reference to artists on Residence with National Gallery and to colleagues in the Universal Studios of Art. It gives the background of Index as one that emerges from the interaction of marriage of convenience between the artists of both Universal Studios of Art and Aina Onabolu Studios. It also asserts the philosophical symbolism of the index finger pointing to the right direction for other fingers to follow; that the finger is the group, which, as a pacesetter, is committed to production of works of high artistic standard. Announcing the group's maiden exhibition to the arts community and the Nigerian populace, it adds that Index shall exhibit yearly.³⁹

Index (second edition) reviews the group's second annual exhibition with three essays. These are 'Foreword: Beyond Forms: Paradigmatic Crossroads', 'Retracing African Art through Contemporary Forms', and 'Beyond Forms: A Mission Statement'. The foreword describes form as a 'defined volume of void or matter in a referential space'.⁴⁰ It adds that one may idealize forms or put it together in tactile solid geometry in practical term. The foreword reveals that Index's second annual exhibition is a parade or

expressions of many unique features of Nigerian genre, adding that Pendulum Art Gallery is in charge of the show. It also reveals that the sub-title and theme of the exhibition stress on forms through 'individualistic techniques, colour logics, formalistic departures from tradition and stylistic tendencies'.⁴¹ 'Retracing African Art Through Contemporary Forms' by Kehinde Adepogba surveys European attitude to African art, influence of Western art on Western/African trained artists and the present divorce by African artists from Western influence. Adepogba asserts that Index is sticking to African philosophies, idioms, proverbs, oral literature and other traditional ingredients in their art to invigorate African art.⁴²

The 'Beyond Forms: A Mission Statement' shows Mufu Onifade's survey of public reactions to the activities of the group since its maiden exhibition; their challenges as a group, and their philosophical ideology as their driving force, which 'enacts and reenacts the coherence of purpose and focus'.⁴³ Concluding, it cites two members, Basil O'Shilo and Ogaga Tuodeinye who supported the choice of the philosophical theme of the second exhibition. He declares that the former perceives 'Beyond Forms' as what is 'above, superior to, the unknown or the hereafter of shapes, patterns or regularities of that which the mind itself contributes'⁴⁴ and he, Onifade, completes it, 'to creative and artistic essence'.⁴⁵ That of the latter, he declares, is a comparison of 'Beyond Forms' to the bond through the umbilical cord that connects the mother to the child; that when the 'mother gives birth and cord severed, the child lives and feeds on its own'.⁴⁶

Affinity is Index's third annual exhibition in 2005. It reviews the exhibition with three essays: 'Sponsor's Statement' by Bolanle Austin-Peters, 'Affinity' by Mufu Onifade and 'Review, Index and Affinity: The Matters Arising' by Sehinde Ademuleya.

Bolanle Austin-Peters's "Sponsor's Statement" is Terra Kulture Gallery's mission as Nigerian Cultural Centre to promote the richness and diversity of Nigerian languages, arts and culture. Bolanle Austin-Peters reveals that Terra Kulture Gallery is committed to sponsorship and promotion of arts and culture in Nigeria and then presents the exhibition to the public.⁴⁷ "Affinity" by Mufu Onifade, co-coordinator of Index, is an appraisal of both public opinion and art activities of the group. Mufu Onifade asserts in the essay that Index fights against all odds to survive artistically and then presents the exhibition to the public as part of independence celebration for artistic assessment.⁴⁸ Sehinde Ademuleya in his "Review, Index and Affinity: The Matters Arising" surveys the origin and development of Index, congratulates the group on the success of its first lecture series and presents the exhibition to members for their judgment.⁴⁹

Remotely but very important to this research are some exhibition catalogues that are a great force on the study. These are the *Resurgence*, the *Togetherness* and the *Dreams Alive 7*. The *Resurgence* is relevant with the following essays: "Curators Note" by U.N.O. Edewor, "2 Decades of Art in Delta State: Yesterday, today and tomorrow" by Dennis Uwawah and "Introduction" by A.M. Diakparomre. U.N.O. Edewor reveals that Delta State Government, in collaboration with Society of Nigerian Artists, exhibits the best of notable Deltan artists who are both first generation and budding artists of modern Nigerian art. He also reveals that the Society of Nigerian Artists, Delta Chapter, is rekindling her zeal to take art to the next level since the society is a major stake holder in the cultural sector and that the society has been appointed a statutory member of the Art Council and Tourism Board.⁵⁰ Dennis Uwawah attempts to define art as a concept that transcends forms and beauty; that it is an effective social tool for enlightenment to

develop mental power. He adds that the artists have always been concerned with expressing reality because they see the world in visual forms. Uwawah reveals that as part of the effort to recognize the artists, Delta State Government has built a museum to house a collection of the visual arts of the state, and it is collecting artists of the state to produce a directory of visual artists in order to promote them.⁵¹

The "Introduction" by A.M. Diakparomre attempts to define the theme of the exhibition, tracing it to its Latin root as resurgence, which alludes to an inactive past but is rising again with a force. He traces the history of artistic resurgence from Europe to Society of Nigerian Artists, Delta State Chapter and acknowledges the presence of the old generation of modern Nigerian artists, who, he thinks, are an inspiration to the budding ones. He concludes that art is the song of the soul.⁵²

The *Togetherness* is relevant to the study with two essays: "Beauty through Function and as Function" by Evelyn N. Oputu and "Intercourse of Power, Economics and Art: Sustaining a South-South Age Long Tradition in the 21st Century" by U.N.O. Edewor. Evelyn N. Oputu attempts to draw a line between aesthetics and function and shows aesthetics and function as correlates in design. Citing the Czech aesthetician, Jan Mukarovsky, she attempts to establish that a well designed and useful product appeals through its beauty and asserts that this is how beauty through function should be understood. Linking art with beauty and function, she reveals that art is a "life-force that provides blissful relaxation with clear convictions to deal with urgent demands of life"⁵³ and then urges people to note that "great men are those who are ashamed to fall below certain standards of life."⁵⁴

The 'Intercourse of Power, Economics and Art: Sustaining a South-South Age Long Tradition in the 21st Century', by U.N.O. Edewor, attempts to establish politics, economics and art as correlates in nation building. Citing a number of instances as support, Edewor reveals that art is in the service of economics and politics and economics and politics are in the service of art.⁵⁵ The *Dreams Alive 7* is also relevant with two essays. These are 'Introduction, Nsukka School: A Product of Nationalism' by Ola Olodi and 'Foreword' by Basil N. Onyejebu. Ola Olodi traces the history of Nsukka Art School to the 1920s, during Aina Onabolu's college days in London when members of the West African Congress attended the college exhibition and described his paintings as nationalistic. He reveals that Herbert Macaulay transferred the nationalistic force to Nnamdi Azikiwe who also transferred it to the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka that symbolizes the art school. He attributes the success of art in the department to the efforts of Uche Okeke who continued the nationalistic force to which 'dreams alive' is a derivative.⁵⁶

Basil N. Onyejebu reveals that *Dreams Alive* is a body of students of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts that exhibits final year students' works every year. According to him, the title of the maiden edition twenty years earlier was 'Art on the Streets', and that the title of the present edition is 'Resilience', in keeping with dreams alive. He explains further that the exhibition is a testimony to hard work and that the works are a conceptual force, which emanates from creatively endowed crop of artist students and asserts that the exhibition shows that their dreams are alive.⁵⁷

Outside exhibition catalogues, Mufu Onifade and his *Ara* art are common features in the Nigerian print media and art seminars. The *Guardian* takes great interest in

reviewing *Ara* art. In his "Araism: Pushing the Frontiers of Visual Expression" in the *Guardian*, Akin Onipede discusses the claims and counter claims of *Ara* art whether or not it is an extension of Onaism. Although Onipede acknowledges the uniqueness and aesthetic excellence of *Ara* art and commends Onifade for extending the frontiers of visual art, he aptly takes side, supporting the claim that Araism or *Ara* art is an extension of Onaism or Ona art.⁵⁸

The *Times Reader Magazine* also features *Ara* art. In his "Giant Stride by Ara Exponent", Segun Ajayi reveals *Ara* as a new synergy between the arts genre and an innovation in artistic enterprise. In this review, Ajayi further explains that Ara Studio on Saturday, July 22, 2006, formally opens for business and that he describes Mufu Onifade as an artist and curator who builds a "melting pot for the visual and theatrical arts".⁵⁹ Ajayi adds that the Studio in the National Gallery of Art held an exhibition that featured Onifade's paintings and dances performed by his The Crown Troupe of Nigeria. He explains that The Crown Troupe of Nigeria is Onifade's brainchild and that the exhibition of paintings and dance bear the same theme, "Ise lo see dase, Owo o see dana" (You can only work alone, you cannot spend money alone).⁶⁰

The Guardian also reviews the above exhibition and dance. In his "Ara and Onifade's Creative Fount", Kehinde Adepegba describes Mufu Onifade as a painter and art manager who opens his Ara Studio with an art exhibition and dance by The Crown Troupe of Africa. Adepegba translates *Ara*, a Yoruba word, as *wonder*. He depicts *Ara* as an acronym of aesthetically rich art and adds that the two connotations fuse together to form the artistic philosophy of a unique technique, known as *Ara* art or Araism.⁶¹ *Africa Today Magazine* is also in the crusade featuring *Ara* art. In his "In a Class of its Own",

Femi Macaulay reviews Onifade's exhibition of Goatskin paintings at the Ajibulu-Moniya Gallery, Lagos. Macaulay reveals that the "Voice of Nigeria (VON)" commissioned the gallery to paint extra-ordinary portraits of President Olusegun Obasanjo, his vice, Atiku Abubakar and the Information Minister, Jerry Gana. Mufu Onifade, the curator of the gallery, was chosen to produce the paintings. He discloses that the gallery has produced over 35 commissioned portraits of important personalities on animal skin. He also reports that Onifade explained the function of the animal skin to the paintings that the fur serves as an embellishment to the captivating background and that this surprises many who see it the first time.⁶²

Apart from visual arts, Mufu Onifade is also endowed with great creative excellence and very versatile in other areas of art. Onifade's critical experiences and art discourses are very rewarding and worth critical analysis. In his "Realism in Self-Assertion: Muses and Fuses on the Art and Creativity of Olumide Oresegun" in *Movement of Reasons*, Mufu Onifade classifies his discussion into many pertinent categories and concludes with advice to Oresegun to practise harder in order to "clean up the rough edges to be able to build on his strength"⁶³ In "Abayomi Barber: Regeneration, Re-fertilization and Revitalization of a School of Thought" in *Dance of the Mind*, Mufu Onifade reviews Abayomi Barber as an artist. He also classifies his discussion into many pertinent categories and concludes by describing Abayomi Barber as a successful master, who is more dedicated to art and a colossus that bestride people's consciousness through art.⁶⁴ Barber, in this regard, has been a source of inspiration to Onifade.

The "Living Masters and True Characters of Mastership" in *Guardian*, carries Mufu Onifade's exhibition reviews of the works of art of some notable Nigerian artists.

The exhibition was put together by Mydrim Gallery for Terakulture Gallery, Lagos. He reveals that, though the title of the exhibition, 'Living Masters', suggests nine Nigerian artists, one of the nine exhibitors, El Anatsui, is a Ghanaian who lectures at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The review raises pertinent questions on some of the challenges that confront the Nigerian art industry.⁶⁵ The *Sunday Punch* in its Arts page publishes an article with the caption, *Artists to Watch in the 21st Century*. It discusses Mufu Onifade as a painter of the Obafemi Awolowo School – who has evolved a style which he dubs 'Araism' and that 'he is also respected for being the only Nigerian artist using animal skin as support for his paintings'.⁶⁶

Summarily, the review portrays Onifade as an artist and a writer. As an artist, he is characterized as an energetic, intellectual and experimentalist painter who has experimented and evolved *Ara* art style or Araism, which has become a fast growing movement in modern Nigerian art. A great artist, he is also shown as a remarkable curator and artist administrator who has organized many seminars successfully. As a writer, he is exemplified as an astute art historian whose critical art experiences found exhibition catalogues and newspapers veritable channels of expression. The review also reveals play writing and symposia as other aspects of his writing experiences in which he has commanded great respect. Overall, the review underscores Mufu Onifade's versatility in some areas of visual arts. Very importantly, the review shows that no research has focused on Mufu Onifade as an artist and critic, which necessitates this research titled, 'Creativity, Professionality and Functionality in the works of Mufu Onifade from 1992 to 2012'.

Considering all the above, it is very clear that no specific academic work has been carried out on Mufu Onifade; which is why it is very necessary, therefore, to focus this research on the Creativity, Professionalism and Functionality in the works of Mufu Onifade from 1992 to 2012.

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CHAPTER THREE

MUFU ONIFADE: BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

Mufu Onifade had a very humble beginning. Today such beginning in a society that is shaped virtually by high economic and political interests may lack such force that will help in biographical study. There is little or insufficient publicity, in terms of documentary, analysis, reviews, interviews or research, on him. In this respect, an excursion into the critical study of his biography will present, of course, some difficulties. However, to critically examine his biography and present it in a logical manner, the study will discuss his rather obscure early life, early education as well as his informal and formal art education.

Early Life and Education

Mufutau who has shortened his name to Mufu was born on Wednesday, October 5, 1966. He is the son of Olayiwola who was the only son of Onifade. Onifade was the son of Amole and the grandfather of Mufu. He had six children: Olayiwola and five daughters. The grandfather hails from Ponbe ancestral compound in Ponbe village, about 50 kilometers from Oyo Township in Atiba Local Government Area, Oyo State. Oyo, an ancient city that originated from Old Oyo, is a long-reigning political capital of the entire Yoruba race¹ People believe that Oyo had a high artistic tradition. Olayiwola, Mufu's father, had many friends, especially among the Fulani herdsmen. As a farmer, he had many cows. He was a hunter of high repute in Ponbe, where *Ijala* (Yoruba hunting incantation) was a means of art and living. Olayiwola doubled as a popular hunter and a specialist in *Ijala*. A renowned politician, he was a member of the National Party of Nigeria (N.P.N.) in the Second Republic. Olayiwola had five wives and thirteen children.

Mufu is the second child of his mother. However, the first child of his mother died as a baby while Olayiwola died in 2007.

In Ponbe, Yoruba chants are vehicular language that foster, nurture and disseminate the Yoruba philosophy, oral history, folklores, myth, aesthetics and beliefs of the people. Mufu's father was a custodian of *Layewu*, the hunter's masquerade festival, which holds annually in Ponbe compound. A costume of rich artistic patterns, carved images, dramatic dances, rhythmic drumbeats, oral poetry and colourful body ornamentals characterize the festival. This cultural expression of high artistic tradition is the bedrock of Mufu's cultural and intellectual property, *Ara* art. Indeed, *Layewu*'s artistic image and *Ijala*, as a repertoire of cultural language, form the concept of ideological and philosophical linings of *Ara* art.

Like many infants, the only thing that meant much to him before 1973 was the family. He had been engrossed in the amorous affinity of the polygamous family. His father; Olayiwola Onifade, a hunter, had two wives who were committed to African communal living, showering love on their children. With inexplicable understanding and excellent spirit of communal living forming the pillar of their peaceful polygamy, each wife accepted and treated the children of the other woman like her own.

Each of the wives had a room, and every room was free for the children. Any child of the family could pass the night in any room if he unconsciously dozed off in the room. It did not have to be in the mother's room, which he or she must sleep. The wives were motherly to all children of the family, making it difficult for none family members to know one's biological mother. The children too did many things together. These included playing, fetching water and working on the farm, all evidence of communal

living. Communality was strengthened further by eating together. While all the males ate from one bowl with their father, all the females also ate from one bowl with their mothers. This was the background of young Mufu until 1973 when he was separated from his family and taken to Lagos to learn vulcanizing. Barely seven years, Mufu's experience in 1973 when he left his family in Oyo where he was born and lived shortly was a watershed.

In 1973, Mufu Onifade left his hometown for Lagos where he started his primary school education at St. Joseph Catholic School between 1974 and 1980. Thereafter, he attended Dolphin High School, Lagos, from 1980 to 1985. He joined the "Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture" and worked from 1985 to 1986 as an artist and dancer. Between 1986 and 1988, while still a staff, he proceeded to The Polytechnic, Ibadan, where he obtained his National Diploma in General Arts and won the school's "Best Student Prize". He came back to assume his duty in "Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture" in 1988 and worked until 1989. He was still an active member of "Lagos State Standing Troupe" until 1993. In 1992, Onifade trained under Lemma Guya of Ethiopia at the African Art Museum and Training Institute, Debre-Zeit, Ethiopia, therefore, becoming the foremost Nigerian to master and practice painting on animal skin. With the drive for professionalization, he studied B.A. (Hons.) Fine Arts from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, and graduated in 1997 as the overall best student. The same drive for professionalization spurred him on to study M.A. Art History in the same university between 2005 and 2008.

However, Mufu was sent to Lagos to live with his aunt, Mrs. Nusirat Adejumo, and her husband, Mr. Ganiyu Adejumo, who became Mufu's boss at his vulcanizer's

workshop in Ebute-Ero, a ghetto on Lagos Island. Ebute-Ero shares border with Idumota, Oke-Arin, Offin and the bank of the Lagoon called Osa. It was in this heart of Ebute-Ero, which was populated with touts, petty traders and unskilled labourers, that Mufu, at the age of seven, was enrolled as an apprentice to learn vulcanizing. In the course of this vocation, he was exposed to newspapers often bought by peasants and artisans at Ebute-Ero. Some of these newspapers like the Daily Times and Daily Evening Times, he found some cartoons by such popular cartoonists as Josy Ajiboye and Dave Lash (Dave Lasekan, the son of Akinola Lasekan, who was one of the pioneers of modern Nigerian art). Mufu began to copy some of these cartoons on the white papers of Michelin tube parks, which customers often brought to the workshop. With available empty tube parks in the workshop, Mufu was sure of drawing sheets, because he often cut the white part, which he converted to drawing sheets. These were greatly admired by Mufu's fellow apprentices and customers, while the boss was, however, indifferent. Sadly, fellow apprentices whose responsibility it was to sweep the workshop the following day swept most of these drawings away as trash. This was how the drawings were lost.

In 1974, while still learning vulcanizing, Mufu, on trial and error basis, was enrolled at Saint Joseph's Catholic School, Elegbata, Lagos, to acquire formal primary education. The Saint Joseph's Catholic school, about twenty-minute walk from the workshop, offered general education. Like any infant in his free world, nothing makes meaning more than pictures. Mufu found lessons with illustrations more interesting; his flair for them developed more and more. However, Mufu began to stabilize with time and took all the subjects equally. His intelligence also proved his flair for all subjects but the Nature Corner was a treasure.

The period between 1978 and 1979 was also remarkable in Mufu's life. This was when he got engrossed in shadow boxing. Aided and further prompted by Dauda, the first male child of his boss, Mufu's interest in boxing grew monumentally until he finally took part in boxing competition, which saw him knocking out a bigger opponent, Taofiki. Mufu won the mock trophy made of foil paper, which he retained when the same opponent challenged him. Having beaten his challenger twice, he became over-confident and thereby saw no reason to train for the third fight, which he eventually lost to his challenger.

Mufu was determined to reclaim his title, but could not because of his new interest. To reclaim his title, however, he decided to train at Alakoro Training Centre in Ebute-Ero, which had a reputation for training professional boxers such as Hogan Jimoh, Billy Savage and Dele Jonathan.² At the centre, he noticed the presence of many children in the large compound called Alakoro Training Centre. The centre had many large rooms for different functions like table tennis and cultural dance called entertainment, all for children. Mufu suddenly noticed a number of children climbing the open staircase to an upper room in the building. He followed the children to a big room that was over crowded with children whose attention was on someone else. Mufu pushed his way through and found a man teaching children how to draw and paint. This man was called 'Art Master'.³ Mufu was so fascinated by the drawings that he had to join the informal class. With this one-time experience, Mufu dropped the idea of boxing and took to art. This was how he began to draw and became skillful in art. He produced many drawings before finishing his primary school education.

Having completed his primary school education in 1980, Mufu was determined to acquire secondary education, but this was becoming a mirage because his father had instructed that he should stop after primary education. In 1980, courtesy of free education policy of the government of the Unity Party of Nigeria in Lagos State, Mufu proceeded to acquire secondary education as one of the beneficiaries of the policy.⁴ He started first in Isale-Eko Grammar School but, he and a couple of other students were transferred to Idoluwo High School, Lagos Island, where he became the Social Prefect. In 1981 1982 session, the only art teacher of the school, Mrs. Waziri, left at the end of second term; thus leaving a vacuum for the third term. This time, Mufu had gained recognition as a very good art student. To close the gap Mrs. Waziri's absence had created, the principal of the school quickly engaged Mufu to teach Fine Art to his fellow classmates. Mufu successfully taught forms 1 to 2, comprising thirteen classes.⁵ He was setting the examination questions in Fine Art, but he did not mark the papers. Another art teacher from another school was engaged to mark the papers. However, no one would forget Mufu's efforts in a hurry, as they were remarkable to the growth of the school.

At the end of form 2, three classes of the same set to which Mufu belonged were transferred to Dolphin High School on Adeniji-Adele Road, Lagos Island. Mufu was a pioneer student in other schools from where he had been transferred. Mufu was also a pioneer student in Dolphin High School as he and his classmates became the first set in form 3 because the existing students just resumed their forms 1 and 2 respectively. In 1982, Mufu left the vocation in vulcanizing in Ebute-Ero, which lasted for nine years and moved to his brother's house in Abule-Ijesha very close to Yaba College of Technology, to face his secondary education.

Mufu's artistic escapades and success story continued in his new secondary school. He also held a number of posts at the same time. He was President of the school's Art Club, Dramatic Society, in addition to being the School's Chief Cartoonist and a Social Prefect. Very outstanding in Art Club and Dramatic Society, he led his school to art competitions and won prizes.⁶ He won first prize in Art from Classes 2 to 5. In 1984, the Lagos State Government organized a drama competition for the secondary schools in Lagos. Mufu wrote a play titled *The Consequence of Truancy* for his school. He directed the play and played a lead role. The play won a second price, beating many long established schools to the price.⁷ He also took part in a UNESCO-organized children art exhibition titled *The World Seen Through the Eyes of Youth* held in Paris in 1984.

Eventful in this manner, Mufu's early life in vocational, primary and secondary school education would lay a solid foundation on which he is still building to the admiration of many people. Immediately he completed his secondary school education in 1985, Mufu Onifade worked briefly in a Law Chamber as a clerk before he joined the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture, where he was employed as a Visual Artist Assistant. Restless in his nature, he also joined the council's performing group called Lagos State Standing Troupe as a performing artist. He was called a utility artist, who was competent in practice as visual artist, writer, actor, drummer and dancer. He was simply in a class of his own. Though he was an amateur in the beginning, Mufu's creation of movements and patterns of dance composition lent credence to his choreographic activities. His deep involvement in creating the story and set design were also remarkable. He soon rose and became a professional in his activities and outputs. The Lagos Council for Arts and Culture cannot forget in a hurry Mufu's deep

understanding of technique and movement of the dance idiom and his creations of new dance forms based on Yoruba historical and cultural styles that earned the troupe the ñGolden Eraò.⁸ Mufu was that active member of the Lagos State Standing Troup until 1993 when he totally disengaged to concentrate more on Visual Art above other art forms.

However, Mufu Onifade's contemporaries in the ñGolden Eraò of the Lagos Arts Council then were Biodun Ayoyinka (now famous as Papa Ajasco of Wale Adenuga's famed television comedy series called *Papa Ajasco and Family*), Funmi Odusolu, Yomi Obileye, Tunji Oyelana and Segun Taiwo (late). Gbenga Sonuga, who is presently an Oba (monarch), the *Fadesewa* of Simawa, was the Director of the council who coordinated the troupe that travelled to many states in Nigeria before embarking on a tour of the United States in 1986 to achieve the Golden Era for the council.⁹ Mufu Onifade is widely known today as an artist who has become a promising creative and intellectual figure in the Nigerian art tradition.

Informal Art Education

Mufu's informal art education began with his people's masquerade tradition, which must be extensively discussed here. Egungun traditional festival is core to the masquerade tradition, which gives expression to the tangible and intangible culture of the Oyo people. It features *layewu* masquerade, *Ijala* (hunter's tonal poetry), *iremoje*, *iyere* chants and the high art tradition of the Oyo people, which formed a humble beginning of Mufu Onifade's art inspiration. *Layewu* masquerade with its spectacular performance during Egungun festivals in Oyo is artistic. Indeed, Mufu Onifade admits that he was born into the family of traditional performing artists whose performing streaks are only

imbedded in *Ijala*, iremoje, iyere chanting and *Layewu* masquerade's entertaining nuances.

Mufu's father, Olayiwola Onifade, was a farmer who specialized in hunting wild animals. All the hunters have a common patron, the god of iron - *Ogun*. In Yoruba, every hunter is versed in *Ijala* chanting, being a unique sonorous poetic language adopted by *Ogun*, the master hunter/chanter. Traditional chants have been running in Mufu's lineage. Although Mufu's grandfather, Onifade Amole, was a farmer, he was better known as Ifa priest. Indeed, he retired early from farming to settle down fully into his spiritual calling as an Ifa priest. Like *Ijala*, Ifa has its own tonal poetry called *Iyere*, which is often laced with deep philosophy, folklores and remedies to spiritual problems. The art of poetry intertwined in *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* formed a strong philosophical strengthening that provided a solid background to the firepower that later in life became the lot of Mufu's art creations.

The high artistic tradition of the Oyo people, which manifested more in traditional hunter's chants, *Layewu* performance and Ifa poetry, rubs off on his extended family, thereby producing traditional artists. Involved early in life in the arts of his people, Mufu saw a combination of *Layewu*, *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* as a good springboard to his multifarious endowments, thus accounting for the great talent, creative excellence and versatility in some areas of the arts. It is important to know that *Layewu*, *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* performances effectively combined to give Mufu an informal modest beginning that led to a flourishing and exhilarative artistic enterprise.

Layewu masquerade, *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* are inseparable and have striking similarities in theatrical mode so much so that the discussion of one naturally leads to

another. However, *Layewu*, the hunter's masquerade, doubles as a spirit and a spectacle medium while *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* are tonal poetry, the language employed by the masquerade to bless his retinue of spectators and well-wishers. When *Layewu* masquerade, usually in her facemask and other costumes, chants in performance, she is simply a delight to behold and to whom to listen.

Unlike other volatile masquerades, which use *ofò* (incantations) whether in praying, cursing or even in performance, *Layewu* depends largely on the power and tonal aesthetics of *Ijala* tonal poetry sonorously chanted to delight its audience. The tonal performance is fused with accelerating and electrifying talking drums, rhythmic drumbeats, dramatic display of energetic dance steps, rich regalia of the masquerade composed of hides and skins of wild animals, like lion, tiger, python, carved facemask strewn with antelope horns and unstoppable choruses. *Layewu* masquerade, with her full regalia, is indeed a mobile installation whose gaits are placed on smooth motion with the magical inspiration of *Ijala* tonal poetry. In performance, both *layewu* masquerades, *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* chants are an embodiment of art forms in ritual magic. When *Layewu* is in the spiritualist performance mode, the people believe that the tonal chants of *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* aid her to engender good luck for animal hunting. Apart from her entertaining tendency that pays verbal salutes to life and her emboldening philosophies, *Ijala* is also employed to disengage a dead hunter from the physical realm, which the Yorubas call *isalu aye* to the extraterrestrial realm called *isalu orun*. At that level, *Ijala* is known as *Iremoje*.

Iremoje is a tonal poetry employed by a group of hunters to celebrate the life of a brave, but now deceased hunter. It is a ceremony in which solemn and sober

performances take centre stage to rub in the pain of human loss. In such a performance that extols the good virtues and brave escapades of the death hunter, it is not compulsory to have *Layewu* in performance, but the presence of hunters who are versed in *Ijala* poetry is inevitable. These hunters use the tonal poetry to colour the occasion, which often holds at night, between 8 p.m and 12 midnight. These knowledgeable and brilliant hunters are masters of the art of *Ijala* chants and possess the magic of appropriately eulogizing the dead hunter who is believed to be in transition from one life to another.

Expert drummers who are familiar with the progenitors of the deceased hunter or who are regular drummers for *Layewu* masquerade handle the drums; this assists performing hunters in spiritual elevation that connects them with their transiting colleague. In performance, the drummers are also inspired to transmit spiritually and communicate much more effectively. While the ritual lasts, the chanters and the drummers tap from the rich repertoire of *Ijala* eulogistic poems on individual progenitors. The *Ijala* chanter takes credit for his ability to recall the repertoire from memory in the context of tradition. From the above, the essence of *layewu* masquerade is complex. The complexity of *layewu* masquerades involves *Ijala*, *Iremoje* and *Iyere* chants as personification of art forms in ritual magic to provide a way of playing with language and meaning that must tease and delight.

Fig. 2, *Layewu Masquerade*, is dressed in regalia of a facemask, an attire of a combination of bright colours, a pair of fabric that covers the two legs and a stick in hand. The people at the foreground and background, especially the female dancer are typical example of the indigenes' commitment to and identification with the masquerades in their outing. Critically, *Layewu* masquerade is symbolic of a cult that runs on

progenitors' background with artistic implication. Its facemasks (Figs. 3 and 4) are woodcarvings of an oval shape of three sections.



Fig. 2: *Layewu Masquerade*, wood, paint and regalia, 2009.
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Canada, Suaga Collection.

Layewu Masquerade (Fig. 2) captures the masquerade in action. It uses a human figure in a facemask and draped with flowing garment and a pair of trousers. The masquerade's costumes are classified into two, the outer and the inner attires. They are a good combination of textile and fashion design. Indeed, *Layewu*'s forms, styles, motifs

and aesthetic values in combination, with *Ijala*’s poetic reverie, are immeasurable. They are made with superb precision. The masquerade in a dramatic stride, wields a symbolic cane. In a profile, the masquerade walks in a dramatic mood to chase the little ones who watch from afar. An elderly woman joins the masquerade in a dance to identify with it and amuse the audience. The crowd is not left out in the theatric experience. The masquerade together with the crowd behind in a joyful mood defines the celebration of a traditional festival, the *egungun* festival. *Layewu Masquerade* (Fig. 2) captures the activity in an open space, an open theater. Its mask is carved in three sections.

The facemasks (Figs. 3 and 4) are woodcarvings of an oval form of three sections. The masquerade depends largely on the aesthetics of the head mask, *Layewu* mask. *Layewu*, frontal, (Fig. 3) captures the essence of the aesthetics of a carved wood mask. *Layewu, frontal*, which shows the three sections, is in a frontal plane of reference. Section one has two horns of exponential curve that grow up but bend downwards. In their *Nigerian Images*, William Fagg and Herbert List explain exponential curve of horns equating it with a radius vector whose length increases in geometrical progression as with the spiral of Archimedes and that exponential curve is also known as equiangular curve.¹⁰ They add that in Biology, exponential curve expresses the form of certain parts of growing (but non-living) parts of animals such as horns, tusks, claws, shells and beaks. They cite D’Arcy Thompson that in his *On Growth and Form*, he reveals that the time element always enters into the equiangular spiral, and it is this the tribal peoples seem intuitively to appreciate and to use by way of poetic symbolism in much of their works.¹¹

Section two of the facemask is the main face with a nose that transits smoothly into a staccato open mouth of two abrupt lips and two bulging eyeballs with open pupils.

Other minor forms are two ears in form of cavity, three linear marks on the forehead and three tribal linear marks on either side of the face. Section three is what seems to be the chest area of a bust. The mask is patinated with yellow ochre, but punctuated with black on the cavities. The chest area, which is structurally a base also shows black spots.



Fig. 3: *Layewu* (frontal), wood, paint, 2009.
© Douglas Foster Collection, Tookalook Gallery
Canada, Suaga Collection.



Fig. 4: *Layewu (profile)*, wood, paint, 2009.
© Douglas Foster Collection, Tookalook Gallery
Canada, Suaga Collection.

To show the details of *Layewu* mask, the photo camera captures the mask again in profile. *Layewu, profile* (Fig. 4) depicts the minor forms of *Layewu* mask that combines smooth and staccato transition to make a visual statement on the culture of the Yoruba people. The bulging eyeball is very clear here. The nose seems to grow from the forehead in a smooth transition. It drops into the mouth with a sharp undercut. The lips of two structures seem to grow from the cheeks. The chin is a small mass, which vanishes into the jaws. Its tribal marks of three vertical scarifications on the bulging cheek are very

distinct. The ear is a cavity in a deep shade but with a white line for highlight. The ear, pupil, vertical marks and upper lip appear in black to contrast the yellow ochre with which the mask is generally patinated. While the horn is green the base shows black dots on yellow ochre. While the finishing beauty of the mask (Figs. 3 and 4) is excellent, the message inherent in the poetic idiom is strikingly unambiguous.

The facemask; later venerated with anecdotes of spirituality, is carved by traditional carvers popularly called *onise-ona*. Some families are known to produce great *onise-ona*. Their skill of carving thrives on apprenticeship. These carvers are conversant with the culture, which they symbolize with *Layewu* mask. The imagery of *layewu* defines the character of the mask. The carvers seek to deplore the ductility of expressive forms to attain grandeur in symbolization and spiritualization as a model of cryptic construction. The forms and their aesthetics are meta-language in the culture that produces them. The minor forms and their underlying structure break faith with academic art not because of lack of creative experience but because it is to instill spiritually some consciousness. Aesthetically, the mask uses forms in a combination of smooth and abrupt transition on an overall oval form. The patinated zoomorphic forms (horns) show growth that connotes the essence of humanity.

According to Mufu Onifade, *Layewu* of his lineage called Ponbe, named after his village, is legendary and heroic. After a most entertaining and compelling performance, the masquerade received in 1945 an important gift from the Alaafin of Oyo. The gift today serves as a shin guard that covers *Layewu* legs from the knees to the ankles. This quality of the masquerade is a tradition of excellence that is retained to date.¹² The masquerade and her accompanied performers, dancers, chanters and acrobats, are masters

of the complex verbal, musical and memory skills, which they assimilate and perfect after years of specialized training and involvement in the art form. However, the training requires spiritual and classified efforts in order to have a strong control both of the word and the audience. The performance employs mining, voicing and action to tell a story, after undergoing spiritual training and rehearsing for a period. *Ijala* is a language of the spirit just as *Layewu* is regarded as a spirit being. Though rooted in ritual magic in performance, which enables the performer acceleration into a state of ecstasy and frenzy, the performer is fortified spiritually and intellectually to speak straight from the pool of the tradition.

Annually, whether in Oyo or any other part of Yoruba, egungun traditional festival takes place and displays different kinds of masquerades for not more than two weeks. This time of egungun festival, *Layewu* emerges from its chamber to take part in earthly activities. For *Layewu*, it is entertainment galore. The festival gives expression to the visual and oral tradition/heritage of the people. During the celebration, *Layewu* chooses a day to parade the town. Accompanied by an array of drummers, dancers, chanters and acrobats, the masquerade embarks on *iwode* (traditional carnival), which, together with its acolyte and retinue stop over in front of the compounds of important chiefs, noblemen and women for pure display of entertainments, which is appreciated in cash and kind. It is a great festival, which all participants, irrespective of religious, social, economic or family affinity, look forward to and reminisce thereafter with nostalgia.

Generally, the traditional Yoruba egungun festival, which parades *Layewu* and its *Ijala* flavor, serves as a vehicle for practical expression of cultural language, which emboldens Yoruba cosmology, worldview, cultural practice and philosophy through

which they see and respond to the world. To this end, and judging from the cultural relevance of *Layewu*, it can be argued that both *Layewu*, often encountered during egungun traditional festivals, and *Ijala* poetry, often chanted by hunters and performers, are pure expressions of Yoruba rich culture, traditional aesthetics and age-long traditional art forms. *Ijala* employs words interlaced with traditional imageries whose implications are a compendium of clarity, personages and stories based on human encounters and personified objects. All the above cultural expressions gave impetus to Mufu Onifade's creative formation or artistic interest.

Apart from the Yoruba rich culture, traditional aesthetics and age-long traditional art forms that made a great impact on Onifade's informal Training, Lemma Guya of Ethiopia was also a great factor in his artistic experiences. In 1992, Mufu Onifade had an informal art training in animal skin painting under the legendary Lemma Goya of Ethiopia at the African Art Museum and Training Institute, Debre-Zeit, Ethiopia. After completing the informal training, Onifade began to practise animal skin painting and he allegedly became the foremost Nigerian to master and practise painting in the medium.

His art inspiration also lays claim to cartoons by Dave Lash and Jose Ajiboye regularly featured in newspapers. A man simply called Art Master at Alakoro Training Centre in Lagos also influenced him in practical terms. This was how Onifade had his informal art training that formed a bedrock for his formal art education.

Formal Art Education

In late 1986, Mufu resigned his appointment with the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture in a dramatic way and proceeded to The Polytechnic, Ibadan, where he obtained his National Diploma in General Arts in 1988. To get a true picture of Mufu

Onifade at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, the reaction of his lecturer, Adeleye Pam Makanju, is very pertinent. Makanju, who is presently a Chief Lecture at the Lagos State Polytechnic, taught Mufu Onifade's class of seventy-six students sculpture. A young lecturer then, Makanju was vibrant and friendly, especially with the brilliant and responsible students. He was also a committed and sound educator. These characters endeared him to Mufu Onifade and some of his course mates such as Kayode Adebayo, Kehinde Olarewaju, Steve Adisa and Gbenga Orimoloye who were all very good in Life Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. Mufu Onifade always worked in the studio, proving his doggedness and commitment to acquiring sound and qualitative education that placed him where he is today as an admirer to many.

Makanju emphasizes, in his assessment of Mufu and those other brilliant students, that they usually worked in the studio throughout the night and were still able to meet up with their class lectures the next day; adding that they were full of vigour, energy and life. He reveals that among the brilliant students, Mufu Onifade stood out for detailing his art which was the hallmark of his outstanding quality outdoor painting.¹³ With Mufu Onifade's great performance in the polytechnic, he obtained National Diploma in General Arts, winning the school's Best Student Price award when he graduated in 1988. On graduation, Mufu Onifade returned to his duty post at the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture and stayed on until 1989 when he went into private studio practice. The initial idea of private studio practice evolved into a sustained level of visual language called Ara art and critical analysis of art experiences.

In 1992, Mufu gained admission into the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, to pursue his bachelor's degree in Fine Arts. At the university, Onifade's training at The

Polytechnic, Ibadan and his tutelage under the legendary Lemma Goya of Ethiopia at the African Art Museum and Training Institute, Debre-Zeit, Ethiopia, combined to give him a good creative footing. The Association of Fine Arts students, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, acknowledged Onifade's artistic and managerial prowess and elected him the Vice President while in 200 level. He used his influence as an experienced studio artist to take the association to Lagos for exhibitions from which his fellow students benefitted a lot. With Onifade's influence and artistic catalysis, the association also packaged and organized its remarkable yearly exhibitions that brought credible art patrons from Lagos to Ile-Ife. A typical example is Mr. Tunji Adetunji of Aragon Gallery, Lagos, who later patronized some of the students and even employed one of them after graduation.

As a student, Mufu was restless with artistic activities. A campus Yoruba magazine, *Kowee*, made him its cartoonist. Though his images were comical, they combined serious statements coded in Yoruba cultural philosophy and secular subjects. The blend of technique, content and forms on the images spoke louder than the written literature they reinforced. These endeared Onifade more than they did the publishers to the reading public. In fact, among the litany of magazines making waves on the campus at the time, Mufu went on to win the Cartoonist of the Year Award in 1996 and this brought *Kowee* into better reckoning. He also maintained a weekly column called *Strokesplash* of the Fine Arts Students Association, Department of Fine Art's, called Fine Arts Students Association (FASA) Editorial Press Board whose Editor-in-Chief was his classmate and friend, Kehinde Adepegba. He also won an award from the association for his creative and academic efforts in 1997. He was constantly present at the Department of

Dramatic Arts where he served as playwright, scenic designer or several other roles assigned to him. This came on the heel of his establishment and practical running of a theatre outfit called *The Multiple Stokers*. This way, Mufu Onifade was deeply involved in extra curricula activities. The success of Onifade's extra curricula activities doubled the pursuit of his educational curricula; yet, he graduated with the overall best results in 1997, obtaining his B.A. (Hons.) in Fine Arts.

Mufu Onifade has drive for professionalization and this spurred him to study for his M.A. degree in Art History. This was in the same university between 2005 and 2008. This programme is purely theoretical, but he combined it with practical demonstration of artistic output, making the programme relevant to Masters of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) degree. While religiously carrying out his academic obligations, he also produced outstanding paintings. Very energetic, speedy and precise, Onifade was able to use these paintings for his second solo exhibition that was packaged by the Ara Studio and held at the French Cultural Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos, in 2005.¹⁴ In recognition of his worth, Onifade was recently appointment as Special Assistant on Professional Matters to the Director-General of the National Gallery of Art, Abuja.

From the background above, Mufu Onifade has laid a foundation, which made him a total artist and earned him the sobriquet, "multi-media communicator"¹⁵ with such versatility in literary, performing and visual arts. An interviewer, Victor Nze, describes Mufu Onifade as "a dramatist, playwright, journalist, painter, recording artiste, and now a policy influencer by virtue of his new robe as special assistant on media to the Director General of the National Gallery of Art (NGA)".¹⁶ However, when asked to describe himself, Onifade simply says, "I am an artist".¹⁷

Combining the high artistic tradition of his people judiciously with formal art education as expressed above, Mufu Onifade has become a painter with rare material of art and uncommon styles that have earned him a niche in modern Nigerian art. In this regard, Abiodun Olakun reveals in his ñMatter Araismò in *Araism Movement* that Mufu Onifades excels in the premise of competence and mastery, thereby building a base of admirers, patrons and followers. He adds that the notable attributes of his works are depth of philosophy, especially in the realm of spirituality of Yoruba culture and tradition as well as a command of technique and design.¹⁸ An experimentalist, Onifade completed his university education with the urge to extend the frontier of knowledge in visual arts. He was convinced that visual arts have more to offer beyond the limits of academic art that Obafemi Awolowo University offers and, therefore, desired to, using his words, ‘extend the frontiers of the visual arts’¹⁹ In this respect, the high artistic tradition of his people offered the missing link that brought him to limelight. In his intellectual capacity to extend the frontiers of the visual arts, Onifade’s efforts in painting and art discourses have become very remarkable in modern Nigerian art experience.

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CHAPTER FOUR

MUFU ONIFADE: HIS EARLY WORKS

Mufu Onifade's serious artistic preoccupation dates to the tenth decade of this century, particularly to the 1990s. This was the period he began experimenting with *Ara* art style, which today has become a power weapon for social change. To him, it was the beginning of his professionalism when his works began to show a command of density of texture with cryptic construction and metalanguage. He asserts that professionalism is a construct, which combines professionalization and professionalism for a feel of standard.¹ Encarta defines professionalization as making something professional such as proceeding with something in a professional way by setting high standard that must be met and that professionalism is professional standard as the skill, competence or character expected of a member of a highly trained profession.² However, according to Ola Oloidi, professionalization is the love of or interest in art production, art creation or art practice, professionalism is the love of or interest in attaining standard in art practice while professionalism is the synthesis of the two (professionalization and professionalism).³ Onifade's works, which dates to the tenth decade of this century, particularly to the 1990s, reflect seriously the above postulations. The selected life study in pencil drawing and animal skin paintings in this chapter, therefore, reveal the beginning of his art practice that is strongly marked with professionalism.

Life Study

Fundamental to the visual arts is the drawing skill, which Onifade began to acquire early in life and perfected in his training in higher education. In fact, he was popular in the polytechnic with his great drawing skill. He could capture a model very

naturalistically as the camera does. He showed equal competence in the use of many drawing materials to capture his subjects. The popularity resurfaced when he attended the university. The speed with which he captured his subjects on paper was amazing. His display of the knowledge of the study of anatomy was remarkable. Versed in anatomical study, Onifade combines a high sense of aesthetics with correctness of forms, which *Rogbokun*, *Armrest* (Fig. 5) reveals.



Fig. 5: *Rogbokun* (Armrest), Mufu Onifade, pencil on paper, 40 cm × 30 cm, 1994.
© Mufu Onifade.

Rogbokun, Armrest is a life study in pencil articulated in light and shade on paper. The drawing uses one female figure, which drapes in singlet and shorts with a hairdo that falls backwards. Seated on the floor, the young woman rests on her right arm with legs half-stretched and crossed. Looking into the void, she radiates a pensive look with the gait of one who had had the day's work and seats to recapitulate the past. The line quality is a combination of single and double curves. The uses a mix of single, double and warp to achieve the surfaces. Onifade presents these surfaces with linear tone, blurred cavity and light as highlight to achieve high points. The textures are a combination of smooth and rough in light and shade. He articulates the shade by grading it into lines, blurring and deep smooth shadow of concavities. The artist shapes the individual components into sphere, barrel-like and flat elements, which sometimes lie side by side, interpenetrate or tend to grow out of another.

Conceptually, Onifade depicts the moment with oneself after withdrawing from the bustling public. The drawing conveys a pensive mood with great expectation. The artist articulates the eyes in the fixity that can penetrate a wall. The drawing makes one relax with calm and calculative desire of getting result after the toil. Onifade probably chooses this subject to conceptualize his expectation in the successful exploration period of his *Ara* art style. Compositionally, *Rogbokun, Armrest*, lays emphasis on asymmetric design. It achieves balance with its weight resting on the right hand. Her left hand on top of her legs portrays movement and rhythm suggested with the flow from it, which imaginarily continues but completed by the right hand. The left hand and the legs enfold space, creating two angular shapes and void. The drawing shows depth with spherical and barrel-like components, which, on their own, show light and shade. *Rogbokun* could

entice any busy but tired person from hard work to join her to rest under the cool shade of a tree on the field. In fact, in an environment where holiday from duty is virtually lacking and life's driving force is interpreted to mean acquisition of money the subject of *Rogbokun* is golden. The drawing is successful as an academic art with correctness of formal elements.

Animal Skin Painting

Training under Lemma Goya of Ethiopia in 1992 allegedly to become the foremost Nigerian to master and practise painting on animal skin, Onifade began to explore this medium with verve. He contends that he is the only artist who paints on animal skin (in Nigeria).⁴ Indeed, he has trained some people, including Rufus Ashiru, in animal skin painting and has given it the kind of popularity that makes many prominent Nigerians ask for their portraits in the medium. Taking this skill to greater height, Onifade had exhibitions of his animal skin paintings in Ethiopia in 1992 and in Ajibulu Moniya Gallery, Lagos, in 1994. Apart from painting many personalities like Obasanjo Olusegun, Atiku Abubakar and Jerry Gana on animal skin, Onifade has also painted St. Queen Theresa, commissioned by former Brazilian Ambassador to Nigeria, the mask logo of Festac 87, also acquired earlier by the same ambassador, on animal skin. Indeed, he has painted no fewer than thirty-five portraits of highly placed personalities on animal skin on commission.

The technique of animal skin painting involves chemical treatment and artistic expression. The chemical aspect involves treating the skin chemically in a factory. This is to prevent it from smelling and wrinkling and make it receptive to application of colours. Thereafter, the skin is stretched tightly on a frame with the help of twines that pass

through the edges of the skin on one end and then tied to the frame at the other end and allowed to dry. Artistic expression begins with sketching the forms. Thereafter, the artist then begins to apply colours, avoiding mistakes since any error made cannot be erased. The product of such sketches of forms and application of hues present a fascinating visual quality. The visual quality of the animal skin paintings is aesthetically an embellishment of a canvas that blends with the contents in a tactual harmony. The uniqueness of animal skin painting, therefore, is the visual surface quality it offers to content. However, the technicality is demanding, more so when portraiture itself is tasking.

The veteran artist, Onifade, transfers his knowledge of anatomical study into animal skin painting. His animal skin paintings during this period also show a combination of aesthetics and correctness of forms. He does not suggest forms with strokes but actually expresses them in a manner that seems to have life in them. In this vein, the creative genius commands respect among his fellow artists, commissioners, art collectors, gallery owners and members of the public. The artist, in this manner, builds a world of admirers who derive pleasure and delight from his works. Onifade's works such as the *Untitled Portraiture* (Fig. 6), a male portrait of a professor in the University of Ibadan, show visual correctness of proportion, tone, rhythm, balance and good line quality, all of which portray an overall naturalistic artistry.

Onifade stylistically composes this painting asymmetrically. He drapes the image in a light blue cap and *agbada* (flowing garment) that blend into a little deeper light blue background. His glasses are set in an angle and cast deep shadows on the eyes, which reveal little of the pupils. A red bead punctuated with off-white hangs from his neck

down to his chest. He wears a cap that falls to his left with creases that form deep shadows. The *Agbada* has two vertical creases with deep blue.



Fig. 6: *Untitled Portraiture*, Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on animal skin, 120 cm x 90 cm, 2000.
© Mufu Onifade.

The minor forms on the face show smooth transition that carefully blends into one another. Indeed, the way the head relaxes on the neck also shows smooth transition and

clear sections. The artist also creates depth with light and shade, which helps to define the forms that portray the subject an advanced male adult. The dominant hue of blue in the overall painting harmonizes the subject and canvas. This painting is a blazonry of visual correctness of the elements and principles of art and naturalistic artistry. Contextually, the painting, like photograph, documents the subject in form, age and fashion at a point in time. The *Untitled Portraiture* seems to invite members of the public to commission their own portrait in an animal skin. However, animal skin portrait, like other works of art, is costly; and only privileged few may afford some.

Another of his very interesting work in animal skin, *Untitled Portraiture* (Fig. 7) a female portrait, is a good testimony to Onifade's naturalistic artistry; a skill he has proved beyond every reasonable doubt. In fact, he applies the skill with speed and accuracy to the admiration of many people. Such speed and accuracy on a very technically sensory material that is structurally 2-dimensional can only manifest from training, especially commitment of purpose, realistic appraisal and decisive judgment. Compositionally, the painting is symmetric in a frontal pose. The female figure in the painting is amiable and smiles with fixity of gaze into the void. The minor forms on the face and the manner the head relaxes on the neck aesthetically show smooth transition and sections that carefully blend into one another. The artist drapes her in a blue dress that blends into a lighter purple foreground and background. Depth is created with light and shade. Her hair in deep gold, which falls back on her shoulders, emphasizes depth and further highlights the face that combines light and shade to portray forms in the painting.



Fig. 7: *Untitled Portraiture*, Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on animal skin, 90 cm x 60 cm, 2001.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, the figure in the painting portrays peace of the mind in a relaxed and calm sitting position, of course, in addition to the aesthetic value of much portraiture. The smile on her face is inviting. The smiling female figure's lips are drawn to expose a set of glittering teeth to enliven the face. It makes her to relax more in a youthful posture. The deep purple in the center of the skin narrows down and leads the eyes to the subject.

The use of the deep purple in this manner defines the painting like the theatrical parlance where the soft background music arrests the emotion of the viewer and leads him to a change in what to see next. The image seems to break the course of the deep purple but the artist carefully continues it from the collar of the drapery and vanishes finally into the canvas. The artist attempts to capture the forms of the subject correctly while still guided by the role of aesthetics, which the ductility of hues on the canvas can play on the entire painting. The subject of the portrait no doubt will admire what the artist rather than camera captures of her. The painting is successful in terms of visual correctness of proportion, tone, rhythm and balance. Indeed, the technical intent and execution are strongly married together on a high technically demanding material to achieve a high artistic standard. The correct deployment of hues to reveal their value, intensity and characteristic blending nature clearly portray the skill of a master painter. Contextually, the painting also documents the subject in form, age and fashion at a point in time.

Traditionally, mask constitutes an aspect of African thought. It forms part of the prestige of the people. Indeed, mask expresses African intangible and tangible culture. In traditional African setting, mask features dominantly in traditional festivals, celebrations and cultural dances to entertain, ward off evil, cleanse, initiate or honour some deities. Masks lend credence to traditional festivals with a wide appeal of performance in the indigenous languages that cut across linguistic borders. The masks often found in shrines are sacred. They disguise and protect the users in performance and add colour to what turns out as a theatrical mode. However, Africans believe that mask is both a spirit medium and a channel of ancestral embodiment. In recognition of these and other roles of the African mask, visual artists visualize such imagery in stylize or abstract sculpture or

painting. Masks, therefore, feature prominently in court art such as Benin court art from which the *2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Festac*, in 1977 benefited. Onifade creatively and intellectually alludes to the Benin court art with his *Mask* (Fig. 8), which attests to his naturalistic artistry. *Mask* is a copy of the mask that is the symbol of the *2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Festac*, in 1977.



Fig. 8: *Mask*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on animal skin, 120 cm × 90 cm, 2000.
© Mufu Onifade.

Compositionally, the mask is symmetric in a frontal pose. The artist articulates it in ivory carving style on an animal skin, serving as canvas attached to a metal frame with

strands. The *Mask* retains the character of ivory carving with the forms that are clearly delineated and transiting abruptly. It is set on a bluish canvas. The articulation of hues of blue, brown and off-white forms a creative symphony that assumes the deep shade, which finally highlights the mask in artistic mastery. The upper eyelids are in an oval form, but the lower eyelids are mixing. Contextually, Onifade delves into historical painting, using the *Mask* as a symbol of the art activities of 1977 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Festac, in Nigeria. Originally, the mask was executed in ivory with the staccato style of African carvers.

Contextually, Onifade reacts to the Benin Punitive Expedition of 1897 when the British Naval Force invaded Benin and carted away a large number of art works, including the original version of this mask from the Benin court. *Mask* articulates the British encounter with Oba Ovonramwen. Captain James Phillip, a Briton, requested to visit the Oba, but the Oba turned down the request that his kingdom was celebrating Igwe festival and that he could come after the festival. However, Captain James Phillip and his entourage disobeyed. This angered the Benin people and their soldiers shot and killed seven out of nine Britons. The remaining two fled home with the news. On February 10 1897, British attacked the Benin kingdom and vandalized the palace. The *Binis* fought back from three flanks: Ughoton, Ologbo and Sokponba, but were defeated. Destroying the palace and killing many people, the British soldiers looted more than 2,500 art works of bronze and ivory heads, including the original mask which became the symbol of 1977 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Festac, in Nigeria. Nigeria requested for this mask when she was to host the Festival the British refused to grant the request but allowed Nigerian carvers to copy it.

The artist is prolific in animal skin painting. Out of the prolificacy is *Ekabo*, *Olusegun Obasanjo* (Fig. 9) which clearly depicts the creative fire in Onifade who turns out many fascinating paintings in a short period and exhibits them constantly. He produces animal skin paintings, including *Ekabo*, *Olusegun Obasanjo*, on commission. The portrait was produced on commission through Ajibolu-Moniya Gallery in Lagos where Onifade worked as a Curator/Artist-in-Residence between 1997 and 2002. Naturally, he was producing all the animal skin paintings for which the gallery was commissioned. He has produced the portrait of other important personalities, including that of Abubakar Atiku.

Ekabo is compositionally symmetric, draped in white *agbada* (flowing garment), a pair of glasses and a cap that tilts to the left. The *agbada* vanishes into an off-white background with some patches of purple. The image is in frontal plane of reference. The minor forms of the portrait have smooth transition to retain the natural character of human forms. Nonetheless, the treatment of the forms on the faces is realistic. Contextually, Onifade uses the painting to reveal the dignity of man as an advance study of forms. Revealing this, he strikes a high standard of artistry by retaining the sensory character of materials and still retains its value. The painting is a blazonry of visual correctness of the elements and principles of art and naturalistic artistry. The work also documents the personality, his age and fashion at a point in time. The painting shows Mufu Onifade as a competent disciple of portraitists like Aina Onabolu and Abayomi Barber who communicate, delight, please and entertain the viewers. The path to the class of the masters is very narrow, but Onifade is able to make it.



Fig. 9: *Ekabo* (Olusegun Obasanjo), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on animal skin, 120 cm x 90 cm, 2001.
© Mufu Onifade.

The *Chief Subomi Balogun* (Fig. 10), one of his interesting paintings in animal skin, testifies further to Onifade's mastery of artistry and the technique of animal skin painting. Onifade produces this portrait also on commission through Ajibolu-Moniya Gallery in Lagos. He creates the painting asymmetrically. The figure has frontal axial plane of reference. The forms of the portrait have smooth transition. Here, Onifade attempts to retain the natural character of the man's forms to achieve strong resemblance.

Contextually, Onifade reveals here again the dignity of man as an advance study of forms, achieving a high standard of creativity with mastery of the sensory character of materials.



Fig. 10: *Chief Subomi Balogun*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on animal skin, 120 cm x 90 cm, 2001.
© Mufu Onifade.

The artist is very creative, marrying technicalities with materials and forms. He creates portraiture by evolving forms with correct deployment of colour values. He also

articulates the canvas in such a way that both the image and canvas form a symphony, which results in a compact artistic language. Indeed, any of Onifade's works, including *Dr. P.C. Dike* (Fig. 11) seriously lay claim to mastery.



Fig. 11: *Dr. P. C. Dike*, Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on animal skin, 120 cm x 90 cm, 2001.
© Mufu Onifade.

Using *Dr. P. C. Dike*, Onifade manifests his enviable skill in realism, an area of art many artists avoid for its complexity. Such complexity may multiply with animal skin

because of its peculiarity. He aesthetically produces this portrait in profile, unlike others above in frontal axial plane of reference. The artist carefully blends the image and the background together that the portrait emits radiance of unity and coherence of forms in light and shade. While the cap gives the feel of fabric dyed in black and white through tie and dye, the shirt seems to be dyed in batik method, giving the illusion of textile as an art form in painting. The forms are compact with the dexterity of uncommon mastery, which makes the portrait successful. The forms are bold and distinct with striking resemblance. Contextually, with *Dr. P. C. Dike*, Onifade attempts to achieve aesthetic value, stemming from creative competence with which he documents the subject. He immortalizes Dr. P. C. Dike, documents Dike's one time fashion and that of his people, which enhances the prestige of his people. The fascinating painting is capable of inviting someone to commission Mufu Onifade to make his portrait on an animal skin. The derivable delight and entertainment quality of the work actually make the viewer to commission the artist.

When Onifade resigned his job with Ajibolu-Moniya Gallery in 2002, his patronage continued in amazing manner. Usually, he has high demand between September and December, which keeps him busy in these last three months of the year. Mufu explains why he is busy at the period. To him, if somebody wants a gift for a particular person, he commissions the person's portrait without letting the owner know about and that if the painting he did is good, the commissioner will come back for more.⁵ He explains further that people resort to portraiture because it immortalizes one, adding that portraiture is a very good way of putting somebody's image in public.

Onifade compares portraiture with landscape painting, saying that landscapes have peculiar beauty with many colours to showcase and they also bring out the beauty of

nature in a way one can even feel it, but portraiture immortalizes people.⁶ *Mufu at Work* (Fig. 12) captures Onifade when painting on Zebra skin. *Mufu at Work* gives one an insight into Mufu Onifade's studio and his manner of painting. The studio is opened to a large space where he manipulates large works with a clear view and air. He attaches the skin to a flat standing wooden base. Other paintings and blank canvas are displayed at his left hand side. This suggests that the artist could be working on more than one painting at a time. He also pins the photograph of the subject to his right hand corner of the skin at his eyelevel for a clear view. He paints while standing, wearing white T-shirt and deep blue jeans trousers instead of the usual studio coveralls. He holds the palette steadily with the left hand while the brush yields swiftly to the manipulation of his right hand.

Compositionally, he produces the image, which he drapes in attire that naturally reechoes the colours of the Zebra. The image, which is made to sit on a chair with frontal plane of reference, poses symmetrically. The actual painting is more detailed than the reference material, which shows only the head and a part of the shoulders. The painting adds the torso, including the hands. He holds a long staff. The staff is a slim shaft, which is punctuated with two spherical protuberances that have mild transition. The shaft finally transits into a cup-like structure at the tip. The subject seats on a chair, which has a backrest made of upholstery and wood of convex and concave surfaces laced with a motif of flora and linear textures. Mufu must be working with more than one reference or he is creatively adding to the subject. *Mufu at Work* is one of his popularly commissioned works for highly placed Nigerians. No doubt, Mufu Onifade is notably identified with animal skin painting in Modern Nigerian Art.

Aesthetically, Mufu copies the colours of the skin to the drapery of the subject, thereby achieving unity and coherence of intensity of hues and line quality. The purple upholstery and shin of the wooden part of the chair help to highlight the subject for strong visual capturing. The flow of the white beads strengthens the rhythmic flow of the canvas and the image, including its drapery. The face, backrest of the chair and staff are reconciled in the symphony of forms and hues of brown. The white feathers attached to the cap harmonize with the white straps of the skin and at a point, they break the flow of the black straps and at other points, they penetrate it. Though Onifade is yet to complete *Mufu at Work*, the work largely indicates success.



Fig. 12: *Mufu at Work/Zebra Skin Painting*, 2002.
© Mufu Onifade.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ONIFADE: THE ARAISM

Over the years, art has been defined by varieties of style. Such varieties of style deploy imageries, principles and elements of art with some peculiarities to attain grandeur in visual experience, which leads to 'stylistic homogeneity'. Schools or movements in art, therefore, emerge naturally from that 'stylistic homogeneity'. The emerging movements or schools are products of either 'convictions or principles that either silently or vigorously snubbed any form of creative coercion or compromise'.¹ In modern art, visual artists and their works fall into certain art movements because of the commonality of their styles. Every art movement has its drive force as ideological stance, which may or may not be explained by the members in the form of a manifesto. Sometimes art critics do the explanation in their reviews. However, to critically examine Araism and present it in a logical manner, the study finds as a poetic vehicle its emergence, ideology, technique, materials, styles, themes and works.

Emergence and Ideology of Araism

Mufu Onifade began to experiment with *Ara* art style in 1989. The experiment was in progress when he gained admission into Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife in 1992/1993 session. At the time he graduated, he had gained artistic mastery, which served further as a drive to complete the experiment in seven years. He became versed in the style and in May 5, 1998 Onifade exhibited thirty-two paintings of *Ara* art style to the amazement of the public. He also began to teach others, who adopted the same *Ara* art technique with individualized identity and varying styles but with overall cultural ideology. The first set to accept and practise *Ara* art in Nigeria included Oludotun

Poopola, Abiola M. Akande, Babatunde Jimoh, Esther Emmanuel and Jonathan Ikpoza. Eight years later in July 22, 2006, the exponent and his first five followers launched Araism with *Ara* art style paintings and in this way, Araism was born to the full glare of the public as an art movement. July 22, 2006 thus marked the birth of another art movement in modern Nigeria art, which started with what is now accepted generally as Onaboluism that dates back to 1922 when Aina Onabolu started teaching art officially. Since July 22, 2006, Araism has continued to gain wider acceptance and practice by painters, including undergraduates. The ever-increasing group has continued to face *Ara* art style with much verve.

In addition to numerous commissions in Araism painting, private and public, the growing group has exhibited *Ara* art many times in and outside the country. The founder in particular has taken Araism to many countries, including South Africa where he had a 3-month Residency Programme along with four other international artists from different countries, teaching and further exposing it. In South Africa, the exponent was involved in a combination of festivals by Thupelo International Artists and the Great Walk and More Artists held in Cape Town, South Africa. The Residency ended up in a 5-man exhibition titled 'Angaza' Eventually, Araism Movement emerged in the Nigerian art scene and now beyond Nigeria, commanding an artistic language with such eloquence that has become the vernacular in some homes.

Since its launching, however, Araism movement has generated much controversy concerning style, technique, ideology and link with Onaism. The position of one group is that Araism Movement is neither a technique nor an art movement but a style. Another group argues that it is not a style but a technique and an art movement. A survey of the

controversy proves further that to some, it is a style, to others, it is either a technique or a movement. Some also believe that what some people see as a movement is a group because the disciples use the same style that is not based on ideology.² Meanwhile, the exponent reveals that Araism has ideology.³ Consequent upon the controversy, a short survey of some modern art movements will illuminate the nature and ideology of Araism movement.

Generally, an ideology guides an art movement, which is also identified by some general characteristics that invariably define its style.⁴ For example, the Cubists's ideology was to destroy the age-long Western naturalism. The identifiable style, in doing this, was deliberately distorting human features, making the smooth transition of sections of the human body flat, cubical and abrupt. The natural order of landscapes was also broken, making images to interpenetrate and intersect with one another and sky as well as land fusing together without an identifiable line of division.⁵ The Expressionists's ideology used subjectivity to rebel against objectivity. In doing this, the Expressionists presented an emotional experience in a very compelling manner by caricaturing, exaggerating and altering the object in order to evoke intense emotional feeling.⁶ Surrealists's ideology explored and celebrated aspects of dreams and unconscious mind.⁷ Their styles were *Exquisite Corpse*, involving cutting of paper into four parts for execution and *Frottage*, involving rubbing.⁸

Here in Nigeria, Onaboluism, as coined by Ola Olodi in 1997 and after Aina Onabolu's professionalism, sought after naturalistic and realistic painting in which academic art was the ultimate and that formed the ideology. The Onaboluism, therefore, became a metaphor for naturalism.⁹ The ideology of the Zaria Art School is revolution

against Western art Education, which failed to assimilate Nigerian traditional aesthetics. The style of Zaria Art School is synthesis.¹⁰ The ideology of Ulism, as coined by Vincent Amaefunah in 1978, is also synthesis, which gives expression to Igbo cultural philosophy in linear forms.¹¹ The exponent, Uche Okeke, began Ulism by researching into *Uli* and Igbo tangible and intangible culture, embracing body painting, oral folklore and tales behind Uli and Igbo cultural philosophy. Armed with this background, the exponent took to writing poems, became versed in the tangible and intangible forms and gave *Uli* literary content. The tangible forms are crafted in expressionism, largely depending on their ability to communicate.¹² The ideology of Onaism is to assimilate Yoruba aesthetics and academic art, thereby celebrating tradition and culture, using conventional painting style to achieve Yoruba motifs, symbolism and aesthetics.¹³

Now like Uche Okeke's Ulism, Araism is the brainchild of Mufu Onifade. Very much like Uche Okeke, Onifade researched into Yoruba tangible and intangible culture and *Ara* art emerged as his finding. The research embraced the legend, myth, oral folklore and aesthetics of the Yoruba people, which help to define the Yoruba worldview. Araism shares these attributes with Onaism but differs in visual and technical expression, which is clearly revealed by the technique of painting. In addition, through Ara Studio, the exponent, like Uche Okeke, began to engage in serious literary exercises, convening seminars and organizing art exhibitions with themes on general art and particularly on Yoruba cultural philosophy.

The cultural philosophy is created in expressionist works of art that depends on their ability to communicate this worldview. The ideology of Araism, therefore, is to reconstruct Yoruba aesthetics. To do this, the painters use poetic lines, colours and

dramatic poses to reconcile academic and traditional art in African symbolism and motifs. Although the works of the exponent, Onifade, and those of his *Ara* disciples vary in artistic wavelength, the overall style is cultured in graphical painting sometimes called *Ara* or Araism. Araism, therefore, has two connotations: style and movement. Very revealing in Araism, therefore, is its ideology, which propels the *Ara* disciples, and this forms the import of his "Forging Ahead with the Ara Identity in Contemporary Art" in *Araism Movement 2*, where Filani avows that an art movement "presupposes in ideological and philosophical position that propels a group of artists".¹⁴

The characteristics of ideology form the compactness of texture in Araism movement. For instance, over the years, art movements have emerged differently, some with or without published manifestoes explaining their ideology. Though Araism movement did not publish her manifesto, the literary activities of Araism movement through Ara Studios are very revealing. *Araists*, Ara disciples, who are Nigerians and non-Nigerians, are spread in different geographical emplacements. Araism movement is characterized by acceptance and practice of a common ideology and an overriding style of expression with individualized identity, all of which are unifying characters of an art movement. It is rewarding to revisit "Forging Ahead with the Ara Identity in Contemporary Art" in *Araism Movement 2*, in which Filani asserts that an art movement "presupposes in ideological and philosophical position that propels a group of artists" to give expression to such a belief. He adds that artists find similar formal means to render their expression without sacrificing individual identity and that the "formal approach to the visual rendition is the style".¹⁶ Araism movement does not leave out any beat of Filani's assertion.

Onifade is very explicit in the ideology of Araism movement. He believes that the ideological stance of Araism movement is rooted in African culture.¹⁷ Describing the arts of the movement as ‘authentic African paintings’ Onifade explains that *Ara* art projects Yoruba prestige and exposes her cosmology to other cultures. He adds that the members of the movement are at liberty to express themselves, especially in thematic parlance.¹⁸ Among his intensions in Araism is the desire to instill certain consciousness in the minds of his audience. To communicate the desires with *Ara* art, Onifade preoccupies himself with the task of evolving his means of communication. Primarily, he uses his *Ara* art to give aesthetic pleasure; seeking to delight and please when he communicates.

In the task of evolving his means of communication, Onifade finds culture a necessary drive. The force finds expression in *layewu* masks and masquerades. His various artistic studies of *layewu* in the exploration period in 1995 form a good testimony and a base for the context of Araism. In his many works such as *Pencil Study of Layewu* (Figs. 13-15), he makes *layewu* to have the visual components, which spiritually and symbolically tilt heavily towards Yoruba aesthetics. Onifade’s *Pencil Study of Layewu* (Figs. 13-15) explores Yoruba’s philosophical themes, using African symbols and motifs in an astounding manner to achieve a complete control of forms in poetic lines and colour.

Compositionally, *Pencil Study of Layewu* (Figs. 13-15) is a variation of studies of *Layewu* masquerades. Onifade makes the study in pencil. He composes the sketches in four sections to take all the images that are associated with *Layewu*. The study in pencil, except the one in colour, does not show detail. The four sections are *Olode*, The Hunters, *Olokiti*, The Acrobat, *Layewu*, The Masquerade and *Alubata*, The Drummer. *Olode*, is

created in frontal axis but other sections are in profile. The axial characters are retained in all the figures. Fig. 15 is a further study of *Layewu* with some details that are not in Figs. 13 and 14. Aesthetically, the studies are a web of expressive lines. They are a combination of curves, complete circles, straight, thick and thin lines, which echo motifs and action. The surfaces of Fig. 14 are warp. The artist defines them by tone blurred in different intensity to achieve highlight and high points. The texture is smooth with sections of components that transits in abrupt and staccato mode. The shading is graded into light and deep shadows.

Contextually, Onifade uses *Pencil Study of Layewu* (Figs. 13-15) to depict Yoruba aesthetics, conveying the mood of ecstasy derived from traditional drumming, singing and dramatic poses. The figures invoke festivity and therefore, merrymaking and lightheartedness. The traditional Yoruba thinking is completely encompassed in these variations of the study of layawu. This is in respect of the connotations of defense in the spirituality of *Olode* (hunting), merrymaking in *Olokiti* (exercises), *Layewu* (dance, singing, chanting) and *Alubata* (drumming). The artist takes the stand of Yoruba tradition, which is compact in *Layewu* study to portray Araism as the epitome and mouthpiece of Yoruba cosmology, complete in cultural language and aesthetics. The choice of the dominance of hues of red is to portray *Layewu*'s centrality in traditional values.

Artistically, these variations of *layewu* study are interesting, particularly for their emphasis on *Layewu* masquerade whose forms show abrupt transition, especially the minor forms on the face, clearly delineated sections and the use of traditional motifs. The drawing is masterly and capable of holding one's attention for its formal elements and

subject. Onifade explores the themes of defense, merrymaking and entertainment, showing mastery of forms, light and shade.



Fig. 13: Pencil Study of *Layewu*, Mufu Onifade, pencil on paper, 40 cm × 20 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Mufu Onifade uses Pencil Study of *Layewu* (Fig. 14) to lay emphasis on the *Layewu*, The Masquerade, which occupies the center of the composition. While forms of *Layewu* vivid forms of other figures are not.



Fig. 14: Pencil Study of *Layewu*, Mufu Onifade, pencil on paper, 40 cm × 20 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.



Fig. 15: Pencil Study of *Layewu*, Mufu Onifade, pencil on paper, 40 cm × 20 cm, 2010.
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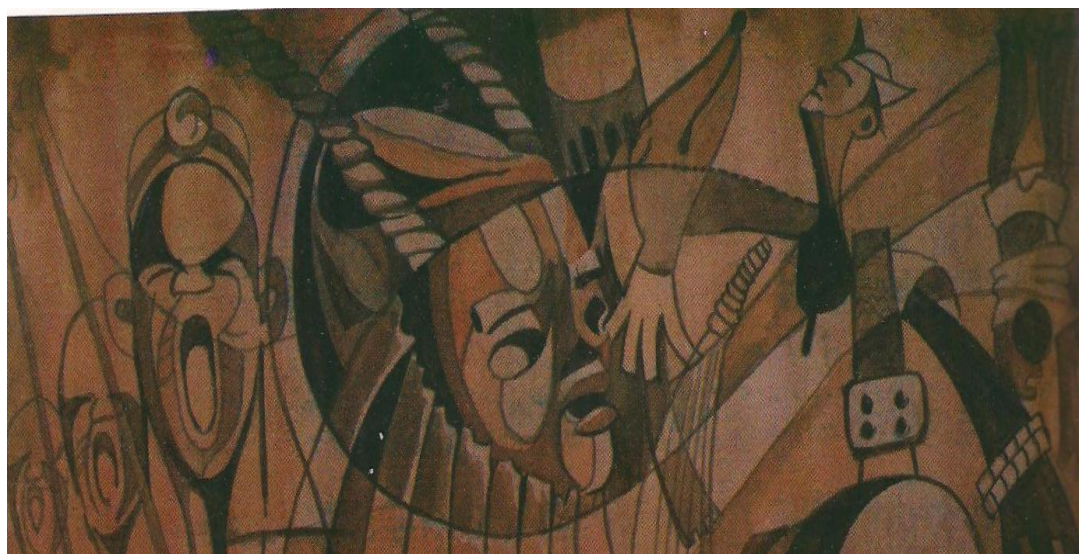


Fig. 16: Colour Rough/Study of *Layewu*, Mufu Onifade,
watercolour on paper, 60 cm × 200 cm, 1995.
© Mufu Onifade.

Colour Rough/Study of Layewu (Figs. 16 and 17) is the colour version of the *Pencil Study of Layewu* (Figs. 13-15). The two versions are in watercolour on paper. They are maintaining compositionally the four sections, showing all the images that are associated with *Layewu*, which are created in both profile and frontal axis. The axial characters are retained in all the figures. Contextually, these versions also retain the

Yoruba aesthetics. Artistically, they also maintain the character of abrupt transition, the clearly delineated sections and the use of traditional motifs. The deployment of hues on their value as aesthetic idiom shows Mufu Onifade a master of artistic feel.



Fig. 17: Colour Rough/Study of *Layewu*, Mufu Onifade, watercolour on paper, 60 cm × 200 cm, 1995.
© Mufu Onifade.

Layewu, Hunter masquerade (Fig. 18) is tempera on jute sack where the artist also retains the dominant characteristics of frontal and profile axial movements in the study of *Layewu*, graduating the hues of brown and white in clearly delineated straps. The human figures are action figures in a festive mood. Some of the components are engaged in verbal and theatric exercises typical of *Layewu* masquerades and *Ijala* chants. The *Layewu* is the dominant figure in its facemask with growing horns. Though the figures are portraits, the artist suggests their movement with open mouths, growing horns and ecstatic mood. He creates depth with aerial perspective by making the figures at the back smaller and less vivid.

Layewu, Hunter masquerade, further emphasizes the cultural drive and artistic content in *Layewu* mask and masquerade. Here, the artist details the visual components of *Layewu* as hunter in relation to Yoruba aesthetics. Onifade articulates *Details from*

Layewu (Fig. 19) in sections, which show hues of yellowish green as dominant colour. Very clearly, he depicts section 1 as *Olode* (The Hunters), section 2 as *Olokiti* (The Acrobat), section 3 as *Layewu* (The Masquerade) and section 4 as *Alubata* (The Drummer). In this work, Onifade gives artistic expression to the details of *layewu*, using additionally hues of red and black.

Contextually, Onifade uses *Layewu*, Hunter masquerade and *Details from Layewu* to depict the egungun festival, a carnival of *Layewu* masks, masquerades and *Ijala* chanters. Onifade reveals that *Layewu* masquerades are legendary and heroic and are a reservoir of cultural costumes, theatric textures and oratory. They are masters of complex verbal, musical and memory skills. Some artists have specialized training in the making of their art forms. On the part of *Ijala* chanters, their chants are reservoir and channels for expressing the people's unadulterated cultural language. Therefore, *Ijala* chants are the Yoruba's museum of her cosmological worldview and philosophical thoughts. *Layewu* and *Ijala*, as expressions of Yoruba rich culture, traditional aesthetics and age-long traditional art forms, are clearly conceptualized in *Ara* art, influencing and sometimes controlling its composition on both the underlying structures and the overall frame. Onifade, in his *Study of layewu*, aptly deploys these characteristics.



Fig. 18: *Layewu* (Hunter masquerade), Mufu Onifade, tempera on jute sack, 60 cm × 200 cm, 1995.
© Mufu Onifade.



Fig. 19: *Details from Layewu*, Mufu Onifade,
 1. *Olode* (The Hunters) 2. *Olokiti* (The Acrobat)
 3. *Layewu* (The Masquerade) 4. *Alubata* (The Drummer), 1995.
 © Mufu Onifade.

Compositionally, *Olode* in *Details from Layewu* (Fig. 19) uses three human busts, each carrying a staff that represents gun. Aesthetically, the busts are elongated with the mouths widely opened in form of a void. Their ears stand at edge. In frontal axial movement, their eyes are closed probably in a reaction to the gun shuts as indicated by

the highlight at the tip of the gun, which signifies explosion. They wear caps to shade off the cold at night. The outline of their shoulders suggests a half circle. The background of yellowish green is a flora motif, which further defines the environment as bush where hunting actually takes place. *Olokiti*, the Acrobat, uses a human figure that is compositionally in sporting activity and a hand with bangle enfolding a drum. The full figure is head-diving with hands pushed forward. The Acrobat is probably energized with the effect of drumming. *Layewu* is a masquerade that uses head mask. The face has the character of wood sculpture with sudden transition and clearly marked sections. The head has two horns that grow from it. Its drapery is of catenary folds that emerge from the neck line. *Alubata*, the Drummer, is one-figure composition. The figure grips the drum that it belts up tightly. In a double plane of reference, frontal and profile, *Alubata* pushes its head up and seems to be lost in ecstasy. Wonderfully, its cap with two horns clings tightly to its head in spite of the dramatic posture.

Layewu is the bedrock of Ara art as it is clearly shown in the *Details from Layewu*. The centrality of the character of *Layewu* to the composition and aesthetics of Ara art is comparable in importance to that of skeleton to the human body. The *Details from Layewu* reveals and further defines Ara art aesthetically as a product of a most commitment of purpose, realistic appraisal and decisive judgment. The character of Ara art as a cultural weapon for social and ideological change lays its claim in *Details from Layewu* (Fig. 19) and *Three Developmental Styles of Ara* (Fig. 22). Figs. 19 and 22 fundamentally define the visual quality of Ara art forms, which some people refer to as Ara art technique or style. *Layewu* largely defines the structure and thematic feel of the forms. However, the *Three Developmental Styles* defines surfaces and textures of the

forms and the canvas. The *Three Developmental Styles* rather than *Layewu* defines the varying sub-styles in *Ara* art and this is where *Ara* art disciples show their individual styles, using crackles technique in painting.

Technique and Materials of *Ara* Art

The technique of producing an *Ara* painting begins with sourcing for materials and tools. The materials and tools are classified into two: those required to make a canvas and those for the actual painting. The first classification requires a stretcher, nail, hammer, canvas, glue and tempera. A stretcher (an angular frame-like wooden peg) is constructed ready to be covered with canvas. The stretcher is covered with canvas to a firm level that leaves no loops at all. Black tempera, or powder pigment, is mixed with glue to produce applicable liquid content called *primer*. The canvas is primed with primer, already mixed tempera - powder pigment and glue. The canvas is then left to dry. The canvas requires another coating of primer to block all pores of the canvas which will be left to dry again. With a properly treated black surface, primed canvas is ready for use.

Materials and tools required for painting are sketchpad, cutting knife or sharpener, pencil, eraser and pigments (acrylic preferably). Others are palette, palette knife, small water container, plastic spoon and painting table. As against easel, a big table is required. It is on the surface of the table that the primed canvas is laid flat, face-up, for the convenience of painting. The idea is conceived on a sketchpad, using pencil and eraser, in case of any error that requires being eradicated. Many sketches are produced and the best one is settled. Using pencil, the final concept is transferred to canvas. Corrections can be made with eraser. The acrylic pigment is mixed to desired hues, tones and values and then applied in crackled strokes on canvas with palette knife. Every artist chooses his

own colour and the angle to place his palette knife to achieve individual style. This process of applying tiny units of strokes continues until the entire surface of the canvas is totally covered. Strokes are laid in such a way that they never merge, thus leaving tiny linear space in-between strokes. The strokes are rendered in irregular shapes to give crackled effects. An artist decides his own shape. That distinguishes the stroke of one artist from the other. Very essentially, while applying colour, the artist must be conscious of eradicating all pencil effects in order to achieve painting finesse.

Materials and Application of Pigments (Fig. 20) captures Onifade demonstrating his *Ara* technique. In it, he also captures the materials for painting, how the canvas is laid flat on a table as against easel and the angle of Onifade's palette knife. *Materials and Application of Pigments* further explains and amplifies the technique of *Ara* painting by displaying an array of the materials. Materials and canvas are laid on table as against easel. The inset is the picture of some materials. The large size picture shows Mufu Onifade applying acrylic with palette knife on canvas laid flat on a table.



Fig. 20: Materials and Application of Pigments, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Materials (Fig. 21) displays the major materials of Ara art. Some of the materials/tools include a big table on which is an open big sketchpad, a piece of fabric and brushes. On the table also are a stretcher, hammer, canvas, glue and tempera. Others are palette, palette knife and small water container. Some of these materials and tools show clearly that Ara technique is not the same as the conventional technique of painting. The crackle effects, the thunderous and wonderful effects that define *Ara* authentic African art and that distinguishes the technique from the conventional technique of painting.



Fig. 21: Materials, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Styles, Themes and Works

Araism as a style is the formal elements of *Ara* art, which is concerned with visual qualities. Since Onifade launched *Ara* art after experimenting it for seven years, it has maintained common distinctive and identifiable visual qualities. His *Ara* disciples also have consistently maintained those common visual qualities. Aesthetically, the works of an artist for a period have common distinctive and identifiable visual qualities. These form his style, which is individual. However, the works of a locality or group of artists also have a style. Artists of a particular locality who work over time also influence one another. The result of the influence shows in form of some general characteristics that define the art works. Consequently, classifications such as Nok art, Ife art, Benin art, Igbo-Ukwu and Esie art are styles in Nigerian traditional art. In addition, the works of a group of artists in different geographical locations have in common certain distinctive characteristics that define them as it is with *Ara*. The group also has common ideologies such as Cubism, Dadaism and Surrealism have. Here in Nigeria, movements or schools such as Zarianism, Ulism, Onaism and Araism have also emerged.

Historically, art styles change through time and artists introduce new materials, techniques, subject and purposes of art. *Ara* art style is dictated dominantly by its technique, Africanness and content.¹⁹ Very essentially, *Ara* art style is one that opposes the convention of painting with brushes. Kunle Filani correctly describes it in *Araism movement 2* that its unique way of creating images is an ñextension and fragmentation of faceting where images are broken down into dominant areas of light and shade and coloured in tints and huesò.²⁰ Evident in *Ara* art are three developmental styles, which are concerned with different visual effects of surfaces.

Three Developmental Styles of Ara (Fig. 22) portrays Onifade's three styles: Flat-Tone-Strokes (crackles), Crack-Within-Crack-Strokes and the Tree-Bark-Effect of surfaces. Within these dominant styles are *Ara* disciples' individual styles. The style of an individual also varies. *Three Developmental Styles of Ara* is in three sections, each representing a style in *Ara* developmental technique. Onifade refers to the visual quality in section 1 as Flat-Tone-Strokes (crackles), section 2 as Crack-Within-Crack-Strokes while the last is Tree-Bark-Effect. These crackles in three different shapes use single curves, double curves and warp surfaces. The colour representing each stage is a distinguishing factor, separating one stage from the other. Fig. 21 presents the three dominant styles that Mufu Onifade uses in his *Ara* art.



Fig. 22: *Three Developmental Styles of Ara*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 120 cm × 200 cm, 2010.

© Mufu Onifade.

Compositionally, *Three Developmental Styles of Ara* is a flat two-dimensional picture plane. The web of crackles serves as motifs. The motifs suggest movement by lying side by side and penetrating one another with growing illusion. Contextually, *Three Developmental Styles of Ara* is the bedrock of Araism. The crackle effects, the thunderous and wonderful effects that define *Ara* authentic African art and this is the distinguishing factor. It is the artistic manifestation of the connotation of the Yoruba word, *Ara*, from which *Ara* art has emerged. Fig. 22 is painstakingly a divine element of artistry. The artistic experience with regard to originality and intricacies of design that are stylistically African, indeed, is rewarding.

Ona ofun, Ona Orun, Measure of Life (Fig. 23), one of the works of the explorative period of Araism, evolves the three developmental styles as divine elements of artistry. *Ona ofun, Ona Orun, Measure of Life*, is composed of human figures, articles and birds, picking waste on the ground. Literally, the figures are engaged in commerce. Aesthetically, the colours used are in the family of red, blue and white in misty straps. With suppressed texture, the lines are a combination of straight, curves and circles. The major shapes are conical and cylindrical. The figures emphasize the article, drawing attention to its measurement. The human figures are in conical form to emphasize the shape of the article. The artist suggests movement with sitting and kneeling figures whose torsos bend towards the article on display. The kneeling figure's hands actually enfold the article. The paintings achieve harmony with the use of colour intensity in the same wavelength. Firstly, the colour intensity of the figures agrees with that of the articles and their stands. Secondly, there is symphony among the tint hues of the seated figure, the stands and the background. The background gives the illusion of a vegetative carpet.

Contextually, *Ona ofun, Ona Orun*, Measure of Life, talks symbolically and spiritually about the measure of life for human beings; the market is a stage, the human figures are players and the article is the script. Indeed, the realistic depiction of this painting lures one into participating in the trading. The painting is interesting for its conical placement and an articulation of action involving all as participants. However, it fails to blend the canvas with the images, making them seem separable, probably, because they form the early stages of the discovery of *Ara* art. *Ona ofun, Ona Orun*, Measure of Life, represents the early years of the experimentation of *Ara* technique that led to *Ara* art style. Beginning with the study of batik crackles and effects, the experiment developed from creating works of art with hobbytex paint on canvas made of batik to the use of polychromatic approach to colouration. A combination of hobbytex and acrylic forms the material that gave the result that is today known as *Ara* art style.



Fig. 23: *Ona ofun, Ona Orun* (Measure of Life) Mufu Onifade, tempera on jute sack, 60 cm × 200 cm, 1994.

© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade's *Aarin-Oja* (Fig. 24) reechoes the aesthetics in *Ona ofun*, *Ona Orun*, *Measure of Life*. The enfolding style is compact in *Aarin-Oja*. The compositional and contextual characters in *Ona ofun*, *Ona Orun*, *Measure of Life* are also running in *Aarin-Oja*. The sitting figure enfolds space and directs attention to the article with her hands, thereby suggesting movement. The standing figures are actually walking. This painting is separated into two sections with imaginary conical line. The sitting figure and her articles are separated this way from those walking.



Fig. 24: *Aarin-Oja*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 76 cm × 69 cm, 2004.
© Mufu Onifade.

However, Onifade has become popular with his *Ara* art where he uses traditional Yoruba woodcarving style of expression in painting. In the use of traditional Yoruba woodcarving style, Onifade gives his works sculptural character by giving the forms in his paintings sculptural surfaces, using convex, concave, convex-concave surfaces. He tries to retain the character of wood such as grains in his paintings while depicting contents in the realm of spirituality, conceptuality and symbolism. Many of the articulated forms are cubic, having proportion that is only African, breaking the academic rule of naturalism and realism. He also treats his linear forms in away that suggest volume. His paintings show the illusion of three-dimensionality with forms that are in abrupt transition. The forms also show clearly delineated sections, as it is common with traditional African sculpture. Many of the works he produced between 2005 and 2009 have these characters.

Iroko (Fig. 25) is evidently a deployment of the use of woodcarving style in *Ara* painting. He composes the painting in abstraction, using the imageries of cowries, masks and carved tusk. The painting is in two sections. The first section portrays a standing tusk with carved facial minor forms, which conveniently serves as a musical instrument. It retains its sensory character of elongation and roundness that diminishes upwards to a point. The remaining section is a horizontally cut section of the tusk, which portrays a pendant. It leaves a large void that is punctuated with some cowries arranged in conical form. Some less vivid masks seem to grow from the cut section of the tusk. Aesthetically, the artist executes the painting on a canvas with dominance of hue of green while the images are brown with an overall linear design. The cowries are off-white to balance the greenish white at the centre background. Generally, the painting relies on round planes of

reference to talk culture and show the power of deployment of forms in colour. The forms have abrupt transitions showing clearly delineated sections of deep shadows. Relying heavily on curvature, circles, pointillism, straight and broken lines as motifs, the painting's combination of deep cavities, voids and high points gives the images the look of carved masks. The colours are a combination of yellowish green, whitish green, brown and off-white.



Fig. 25: *Iroko*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 122 cm x 90 cm, 2008.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, Onifade responds to the Yoruba philosophical thought in which man is limited in his environment. The philosophy holds that man lacks the ability to discern natural occurrence, which are mysteries to him. He wants to know why certain things happen and who is behind them. In addition, he wants to reorder and have control of his environment. These drive him into divination and rituals, which became part of humanity. *Iroko* is here linked in productive clear sound with the vision that the deity, *Orunmila*, reveals. The beating of *Iroko* reinforces the devotees's faith and powerfully delivers divine messages, especially interpreted in sacredness and spirituality. The minor features on the faces and the overall tusk-like structure, an exponential curve, which suggest both growth and African manner of symbolic expression. The painting is successful for its harmony of colour, balance, rhythm and emphasis.

Another of his works that he produced using the traditional Yoruba woodcarving style is *Olokun Esien* (Fig. 26). Among the Yoruba traditional woodcarvers, Onifade is more influenced by Bankole's style. Specifically, Onifade adopts in 2007 *Olokun Esien* from the style of A. Bankole, a very popular traditional Yoruba wood carver who was trained by another renowned traditional Yoruba carver, Lamidi Fakeye. He copies the character of an existing sculpture in painting and retains its sculptural treat of three-dimensionality, proportion, delineated sections and abrupt transition. Compositionally, *Olokun Esien* rides on a horse on a base with linear surface. It is created in cubic forms with sharp transition and clearly demarcated sections. Its features are articulated in African proportion, conceptualization, spiritualization and symbolization. Like a carved wood, the images give the illusion of deep undercut, which was suggested with deep shade. The forms are well defined; round, conical, angular, straight lines in an overall

frontal plane of reference. Their features are created in African sense of proportion with sharp outlines. The canvas and the images are inseparable as they blend into a unified whole with harmonious colour hues and intensity.



Fig. 26: *Olokun Esien* (King's Horsemen), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 41 cm, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, *Olokun Esien* draws its theme from the Yoruba cosmological worldview, using traditional motifs of war as they relate to the king and his equestrians.

Reverberating to the splendor of life of the king's court, the king's equestrians enjoy all the good things of life, sometimes better than the king does but traditionally they must die with the king. The king's life span is a determinant of that of the equestrians. Symbolically, the axe, gourds, cowries, horse and traditional headgear are thematically motifs of defense and protection. These portray the confidence, satisfaction and a sense of dominion that *Olokun Esien* radiates. The painting is successful for its use of formal elements. The painting achieved balance, unity and rhythm as mark of artistry.

However, Onifade had produced *Agbodorogun* (Fig. 27) earlier in 2005. Indeed, this painting is one of the series influenced by its traditional Yoruba woodcarving style. Like *Olokun Esien*, this painting retains its sculptural treat of three-dimensionality, proportion, delineated sections and abrupt transition. The painting is a private collection of Professor Ahmed Yerima, Director General, National Theater/National Troupe of Nigeria. Compositionally, *Agbodorogun* is a single figure that stands on an upturned mortar with linear motifs. Aesthetically, the male figure is draped in a war costume, holding a gun in one hand and an animal horn for drinking in the other. Characteristically, Onifade creates the figure in convex, concave and convex-concave surfaces as common with sculpture. Aesthetically, this painting as if it were sculpture shows interplay of solid and voids, combining tactile surface qualities with a high sense of large volume and weight.

Contextually, *Agbodorogun* explores the theme of defense/protection and hunting, using the motifs of war. Onifade delves into traditional war among the people, revealing their aggression and counter aggression that had existed among neighbouring villages. Every village had to raise her army, in which every soldier relied on one deity or the

other for victory and protection at war. *Agbodorogun* also doubles as a powerful and successful hunter. Symbolically, the horn is a distinguished receptacle for a selected few to drink with in relaxation after a successful outing. The traditional motifs such as the gun, handbags, gourds, cowries and traditional headgear are therefore elements of war, of defense and protection. These suggest the confidence, satisfaction and a sense of dominion that *Agbodorogun* displays. The painting is successful for its use of formal elements, achieving balance, unity and rhythm as mark of artistry.



Fig. 27: *Agbodorogun*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 106 cm × 38 cm, 2005.
© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade is consistent with his use of two styles of expression: traditional Yoruba woodcarving and painterly sub-styles in an overall Araism. His *Akanda*, Special Breed (Fig. 28) portrays a combination of the two sub-styles. Compositionally, the artist produces *Akanda* in four sections that are united with rhythmic lines, colour hues and intensity. The first section displays a sculptural sub-style of expression with two deformed images of male and female standing affectionately. The second section is painterly with the image of spirit. The third section is also painterly with the images of keg of palm wine. The last section is sculptural showing the image of *Obatala*, who fell asleep while heavily clad in traditional attire. Aesthetically, the painting is a web of circles, curves, angular and straight lines as motifs, which are dominantly, produce in yellowish green, using highlights at the centre and top right hand corner for emphasis. The painting combines both cubic and spherical characters to produce images. The figures display woodcarving style of expression with round planes of reference and forms with abrupt transitions and delineated sections. The gourds retain the natural spherical character. The four sections of the painting are balanced up with colour hues and value.

Onifade conceptualizes the painting, *Akanda*, in spiritualization and symbolization of Yoruba philosophical thoughts on drinking and the resultant inebriation. *Obatala* fell asleep while heavily dressed because of intoxication from drunkenness. *Akanda* characterizes the Yoruba philosophy of a presumptuous allusion of the revered *Obatala* (human creator), who became inebriated with *emu* (palm wine) offered to him by a friend. In his inebriation, *Obatala* created human figures with his ordained *amo* (clay) as *akanda* (specials), *aro* (lame), *abuke* (hunchback), *alogo* (deformed head) among others. Humanity found this a big mistake and regrettably *Obatala's* devotees loath

alcohol to avoid the master's mistakes. *Akanda*, however, displays a feel of creativity through emphasis, highlight, rhythm, colour harmony and balance.

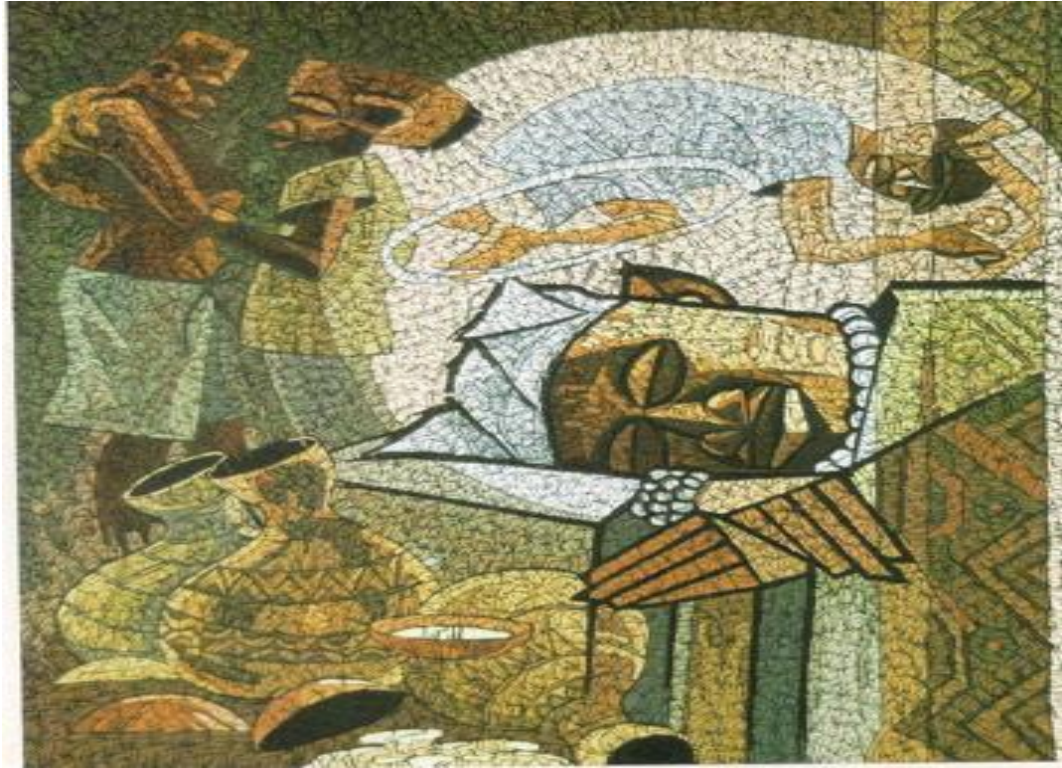


Fig. 28: *Akanda* (Special Breed), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 89 cm × 76 cm, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade is unambiguous in his pursuit of the course that projects the Yoruba cosmological worldview through *Ara* art. His activities to this end reveal worthy creative and intellectual content. This is very revealing in many of his works such as *Sango's Harem* (Fig. 29). Through this painting, Onifade reacts creatively and intellectually to the Yoruba's myth of thunder and lightning. Compositionally, *Sango's Harem* explores a painting style with *Ara* technique, using three standing female figures in a combination of stylization and realism. The centre image holds a symbolic two-edged sword bearing the image of *Sango* while each of the two flanking, hold gourds that are symbolic of

spirituality. In a frontal axial reference, the three female images are aesthetically in deep brown on light blue background and foreground. Looking sharply into the void, the figures stand in awe with their hand fiddling with the items they are holding. Strands of unity and bubbles of their thought encircle them. Their hairdo, a sign of modernity, contrasts their traditional disposition of wrapper covering their torsos only to leave their busts bare.



Fig. 29: *Sango's Harem*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 102 cm x 101 cm, 2008.
© Mufu Onifade.

The abdominal parts of the images vanish into the foreground, blending to a point that it is difficult to distinguish between the two, a show of mastery of skill and materials. The painting pushes its aesthetics further by balancing itself with a conical shape and creating rhythm and movement with straps and bubble that form a web round the images. Depth is created with shade, light and angular perspective. The painting achieves colour harmony, unity by blending images with canvas and rhythm with flow of movement serving as a web. Forms and motifs used are communicative.

Contextually, *Sango's Harem* explores the myth of thunder and lightning. Among the Yorubas, *Sango's Harem* doubles as god of thunder and lightning. Sango was too powerful for his race that he had to overwhelm the king and then ruled as a king. A ferocious warrior that he was, he emitted fire from his mouth. He, however, ruined himself and his kingdom for which he is believed to hang himself. Ironically, the people say *Oba ko so*; literally meaning, the king did not commit suicide. Anyway, his whereabouts were not known. However, his favourite wives, *Oba*, *Oya* and *Osun* who could not locate the mysterious whereabouts of their husband, became rivers for which they are venerated among the people. Onifade teaches the usefulness of discretion in the face of valour, emphasizes the traditional motifs of scepter of power with two-edged sword that bears the image of *Sango* and gourds that are symbolic of spirituality. Therefore, *Sango's Harem* is a motif of caution, discretion and wisdom rather than power.

The forms of Sango fascinate the great artist. *Ara* art, therefore, evolves the character severally with varying motifs and compositions, *Osun Olomoyoyo*, *Osun*, Goddess of fertility and Productivity (Fig. 30) captures. The artist uses these variations in

a female figure, which its background reflects many head masks, all of which stand as a model of fertility. Aesthetically, the work maintains the usual forms of Sango, but with some variations. It shows the usual oval face of eyes with white lower eyelids as a half circle and the nose that extends the forehead and terminates at round lips. The underlying structure of the face is flat, leaving the nose as a ridge and the eyes some form of cowry.



Fig. 30: *Osun Olomoyoyo*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 102 cm x 101 cm, 2006.
© Mufu Onifade.

The artist stylizes the figure, which its hair appears like billets that terminate into a nut, which forms a small cap. The ears, from which earrings hang and dangle, are as

nuts attached horizontally to the cheekbone. Hanging from the neck is a necklace of beads, which form a loop on the rising chest. The figure drapes in Yoruba traditional attire with wrapper hanging from the left shoulder and bracelets of beads at the wrists. Holding the covered calabash tenaciously to the stomach, the figure stands in frontal axial movement and maintains symmetric design.

The domineering figure in *Osun Olomoyoyo*, Osun, Goddess of fertility and Productivity, vanishes into a foreground of head masks at the abdominal part. However, some of the head masks form the immediate background that highlights the figure. Straps of lighter blue run across the canvas and plunge the images and the entire canvas into rhythmic feel. The feel is heightened by the linear and dot motifs, together with the tiny crackles. The mat of head masks in yellow ochre breaks the dominance of hues of blue. The spherical calabash, the round beads and the volumetric human figure add up to break the flatness of forms of the masks and the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Indeed, the lighter blue drapery, yellow ochre head masks on a little deeper hues of blue attempt to marry harmony and contrast in dynamic textures; a work of art from a creative giant. Conceptually, *Osun Olomoyoyo* articulates the traditional Yoruba worldview, which credits fertility of the womb to Osun deity. Tradition dedicates marriage to Osun for the power of childbearing. Couple looks up to Osun, for only she gives children.

Ifa literature, folklores, proverbs, idioms and general aesthetics largely define the traditional Yoruba worldview. Onifade who is a child of tradition uses his *Ara* art to present in symbolic stance and interpret in visual forms the traditional Yoruba worldview. Indeed, such presentation and interpretation are central to the understanding of *Ara* art. *Asoro Dayo*, The Bringer of Joy (Fig. 31) symbolically presents and visually

interprets the concept of joy. Using a male figure and cowries as divine model of success, Onifade composes the work in circles with linear motif. A man whose face the artist casts in the mould of woodcarving style drapes in an abstract attire. Only the head and face show the details of a man in a stylize form; the rest part of the man's body is highly abstracted. Though the man is abstracted, the feel of a man in a seating pose is very clear. Cowries are part of the man on his right hand chest. In fact, he radiates confidence, satisfaction and strength, which transform into joy.

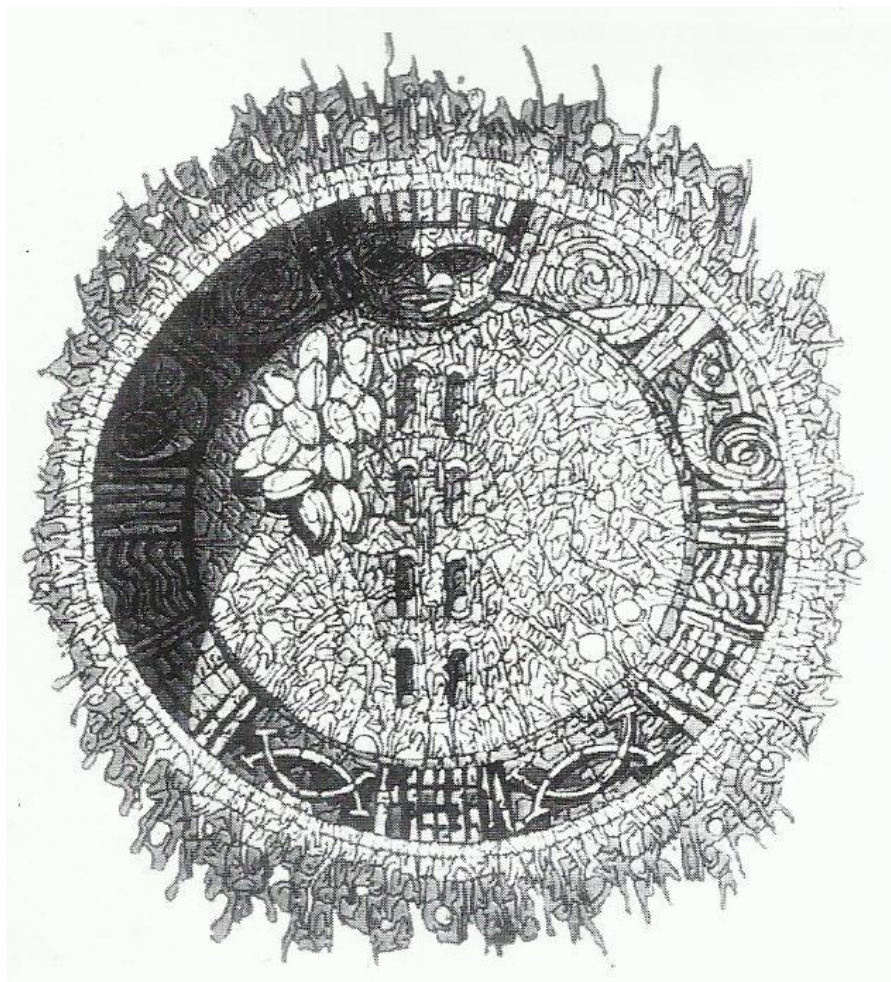


Fig. 31: *Asoro Dayo, The Bringer of Joy*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 102 cm x 101 cm, 2005.

© Mufu Onifade.

Aesthetically, the artist produces *Asoro Dayo* in straps of circle; the human figure is in the inner one. The head grows from the inner one to penetrate the next, which shade and tint of hues of blue divide into two asymmetrically. The linear effect here shows concave, convex, circle, straight and broken quality. The following circle strap uses the hues of blue that has the same intensity with the drapery in the inner circle. The last circle shows flora motif with growing tendency. Some structures in it penetrate seriously into space. *Ara* art. *Asoro Dayo* is a web of abstract design laced with technical proficiency and variegated meanings.

Although the themes of Yoruba culture dominate *Ara* art, Onifade sometimes explores cultural themes of other cultures. However, there are some similarities between the two cultures, which seem to have some implications on *Ara* art. *Latoke Oya*, Drummer from the North (Fig. 32) reveals these implications. This painting explores the theme of culture, using a traditional drummer who is drumming in a crowd. Compositionally, Onifade produces *Latoke Oya* as a dominant figure in realism while other forms are silhouettes of human figures at the background. He drapes the drummer in a white flowing garment, a pair of folded trousers, a pair of slippers and a turban to reveal the geographical emplacement. The drummer bets his drum that hangs with a strap from his left shoulder while the right hand that holds the drumstick is raised ready for drumming. He does not lose sight of aesthetics, which he displays by balancing the hue of brown on the face, arms and drum with that on the legs. The green in the foreground also balances that in the dress and at the feet. Strands of deep green also form the crackles that run round the whole work. The painting emphasizes the motif of drumming. The dominant figure seems to speak for those in silhouette at the background, which serve as

motifs of balance and depth. The formal elements of the painting put the work in the realm of realism. Contextually, Onifade uses *Latoke Oya* philosophically to highlight the impact of acculturation in society. A man from the north is at home in Yoruba culture, drumming, dancing and perhaps chanting *Ijala*. The talking drum among the Yorubas and the northerners is a strong expression of culture. Onifade reveals the implications of the talking drum on culture with the emphasis on the drummer who spiritually and symbolically affect man in his society.



Fig. 32: *Latoke Oya* (Drummer from the North) Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 70 cm × 52 cm, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

The theme of traditional system of communication through drumming is very strong in Araism. Onifade seems to be at home in depicting this with the talking drum, laying emphasis on the angle of the drum and style of beating it with respect to the audience. Another of his works that seem to be an oracle of traditional system of communication, using the talking drum is Onifade's *Kele-kele-ko* (Fig. 33). Compositionally, the painting displays a drummer who plays three drums that are strapped to the left shoulder. The drummer who stands on the head of a pair of drums, which forms a foreground, is created in Yoruba traditional attire. At the background of the painting is another musical instrument, a xylophone, which spirals from his feet to the back of his head. The figure is treated with light blue that is dominated with broken patches of white. This treatment is repeated at the background for balance. The figure separates from the background with a strap of white, giving an illusion of a figure in a transparent womb. Onifade shows a high sense of aesthetics through this painting by producing the figure in elongation with expressive broken lines and frontal axial movement except the head, which is in profile. He creates balance in the work with an illusion of transparent tube, using rhythm, movement and depth that result from light and shade.

Contextually, Onifade creatively surveys traditional communicative music through *Kele-kele-ko* while using traditional motifs of drumming. Among the Yoruba people, traditional drumming is connotatively communicative. It is also understood as a career and a channel of entertainment. In its communicative prowess, traditional drumming sometimes assumes the character of a spirit medium through benevolence spirits speaks to man. At other times, the ancestors speak to the living through ancestral

medium. *Kele-kele-ko* achieves harmony and rhythmic flow with the motifs of ecstasy from drumming, perhaps, in communication with the great beyond. In its entertaining enactment, it is a source of merriment, involving folklore, storytelling, traditional drama and dance.



Fig. 33: *Kele-kele-ko*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 107 cm × 38 cm, 2004.
© Mufu Onifade.

Araism is widely associated with *Layewu* mask and masquerade. Indeed, it is difficult to separate the structure and meaning of *layewu* from Araism. *Ajoji*, Stranger

among Masks (Fig. 34) investigates the character and meaning of *layewu* mask while depicting modernity and traditionality of a growing society. Onifade composes *Ajoji* as facial masks and a female figure to combine the use of woodcarving and painting styles of expression. The masks in woodcarving style are in staccato forms while the female figure is in painterly style. The stranger, a female figure in English dress, stands with her hands folded across her chest. A growing feather defines *Layewu* mask for easy identification among other masks. One masquerade among others wears a head mask, which, like flaps, runs down either side of the face. Aesthetically, some of the masks are expressed in concavity, convex-concave, warp surfaces, holes and voids. Other characters are staccato minor forms and smooth transitional forms and sections. The green colour drapery of the woman at the foreground is harmonized with deeper green and yellowish green that form a backdrop. Linear forms are created as bearded masks, which serves as a mat-like canvas that helps to create unity and rhythm with images and canvas. The vegetative crackles, which further reinforce the canvas, clearly serve as a mark of variety in *Ajoji*.

Onifade uses *Ajoji* contextually to portray the theme of acculturation, the generational giving and taking of culture, the inflow of modernity into tradition. In spite of modernity taking everywhere in society, he saw tradition as the main stay of the society. The female figure takes solace in the warmth of the masks. However, the strange looks of the female figure representing modernity among the masks is not only revealing but also incongruous in a place that ought to be her home. *Ajoji*'s deployment of forms of masks, masquerade and English attire as motifs of acculturation is very successful.

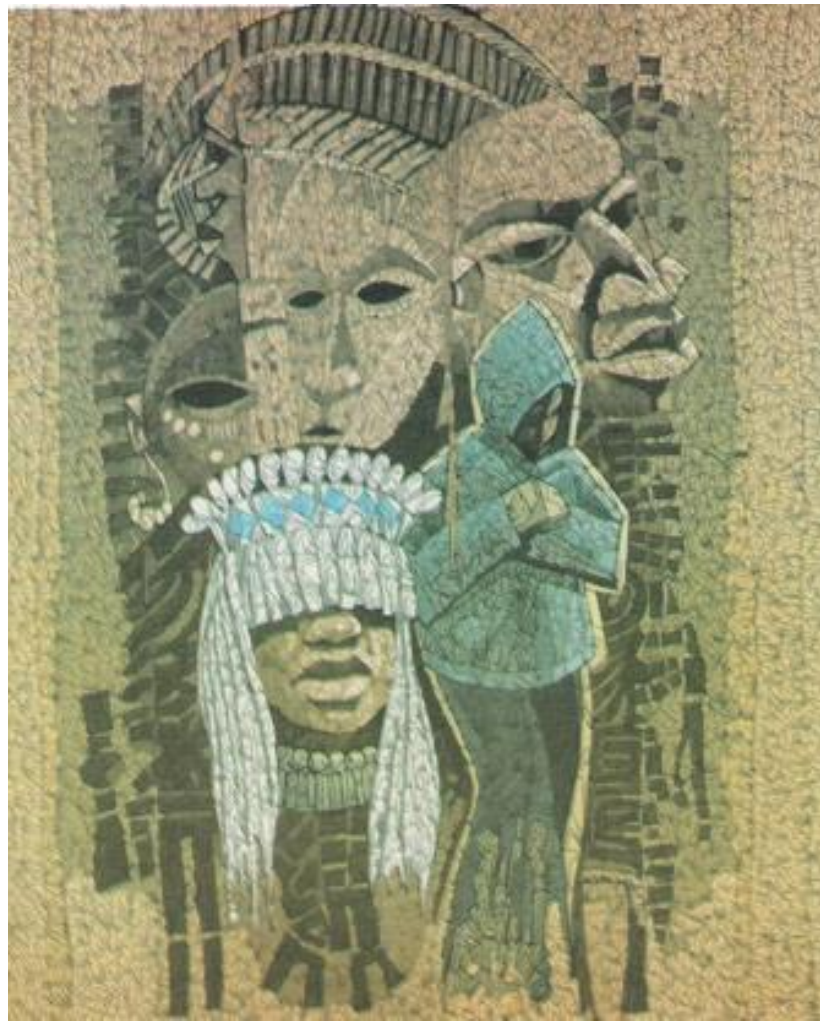


Fig. 34: *Ajoji* (Stranger among Masks), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 90 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade comments widely on society, using his *Ara* art as a social force. In most cases, he crusades for a positive change, condemning evil and praising virtue. He deploys his *Ipako O Gbo Suti* (Fig. 35) as a philosophical weapon to capture the dynamic verbosity of a society and attempts to attain a new order. He composes this painting in two sections. The first section is crafted in frontal axis while the other is in back axial plane. The section in frontal axial movement is abstracted human figures with elongated features in straps of graduated colour. Engaged in gossip, one figure gazes with its mouth

widely opened. The other is listening very attentively with its mouth closed but with the fixity of gaze. Straps of circles connect this section with the other, which has two stylized figures in back axis. Aesthetics reveals that the two sections contradict each other. The second section has two figures whose inaction contracts the action of the first. This section's stylization also contracts the abstraction in the first. The two sections are balanced up with the use of colour hues and value, creating rhythmic movement that flows like a web. The artist created depth with light, shade and aerial perspective. Indeed, the painting is a success for its web of movement and compactness.



Fig. 35: *Ipako O Gbo Suti (Let Them Say)* Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 105 cm × 75 cm, 2004.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, Onifade uses *Ipako O Gbo Suti* to reveal a society that is engaged in gossips with each segment varying in different degrees. The artist believes that society can hardly be separated from gossips. Gossips have reduced efficiency in officialdom. Religion is incapable in dealing with. Science is helpless about it. However, it enriches the arts. Literature finds it a veritable ambience. Visual arts draw fascinating imagery from it. The artist here presents imageries of *Ipako O Gbo Suti* in such a way that some talk, some listen and others are just indifferent. Additionally, while some fight over such gossips others just feel that such things said behind them do not affect them. *Ipako O Gbo Suti* makes a strong statement on society, using gossip as an aspect of society that reflects the nature of man. Therefore, *Ipako O Gbo Suti* is symbolically a mirror, reflecting man in the dialectics of human history.

The great artist returns often to his traditional Yoruba woodcarving style, finding solace in the formal elements, African symbolism and motifs, which speak unambiguously straight from tradition. *Jengbetiele*, Fortified (Fig. 36) portrays woodcarving style of expression in painting. It makes a serious statement on man's lack of understanding of his environment and his desire to reorder it. Drawing from the imagery of vanity and man's hope for a change, *Jengbetiele* resorts to compactness of motifs of defense.

Compositionally, the artist articulates the form of a male figure in profile, relying heavily on colour hues and their intensity. The figure stands with his hands folded in awe, gazing into the void. He aesthetically produces the minor features on the face and the forms on the headgear in staccato, abrupt transition and clearly delineation as it is wont of traditional African woodcarving style. The portrait is in lines and straps of colour hues.

The figure and the background show a symphony of colour hues and value yet the image is distinct. The lines used are convex, concave, straight, circular and angular. It has a warp surface and smooth texture. The painting achieves distinctiveness with colour harmony, rhythm, emphasis and unity between image and canvas, making the painting a very successful one.



Fig. 36: *Jengbetiele (Fortified)*, Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on canvas, 71 cm × 46 cm, 2009.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, Onifade, in *Jengbetiele*, Fortified (Fig. 36) reveals spiritually a man's lack of understanding of his environment and his desire to reorder it. To Onifade, man is limited in his dealing with nature. Therefore, he has been confronted continually with why and how certain things like death, earthquake and diseases occur. In his limitation, man believes that someone or forces are responsible for those and other occurrences. He also believes that he could get close to that someone or those forces to control or influence them in order to reorder his world. In this course, man then sought to make what is intangible tangible, immaterial, material and superhuman, individual. Therefore, man gave himself to dogmas and rituals. Onifade reflects on dogmas and rituals, using the motifs of defense.

The artist is philosophically and sociologically determined. Very meticulous, Onifade picks the details of society in his paintings. Many of his paintings such as *Ise lo see dase* (Fig. 37) captures man's attitude to money. He composes *Ise lo see dase* in four sections on thematic undertone. The themes run from festival with cultural motifs, education with two children going to school through gossip to workforce, a man tilling the soil (farming). The family of red and blue is employed to create a compact harmonious and balanced composition. The texture is smooth. The surface is dominantly warped. However, the painting is compact with rhythmic movement suggested with an arrow that links sections 1 and 2. The male figure links sections 2 and 3 and a male bust links 3 with 4. The male bust and the male figure hoeing help to create depth in the overall painting. Aesthetically, the painting is successful with good choice of colour, balance and movement in a web of design.



Fig. 37: *Ise lo see base*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 90 cm, 2011.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, *Ise lo see base* comments on people's attitude towards money. It is about how one makes money alone but allows many people to join him to spend it. Onifade uses the painting to ask a pertinent question rhetorically, *Ise lo see base awo se bano* (Is not the only person who makes money that spends it), challenging the psyche of the society. The one who makes the money is almost obscure probably in the village as it is portrayed in a section of the painting. He makes money and spends a large part of it on others such as dependants. Implicitly, some government functionaries engage in sharp practices to enrich themselves in spite of the risk involved. They can live large with the sharp practices, but they do not spend the money on only themselves. However, if peradventure they are caught and the law is invoked on them, they are the ones that suffer

but not with those who enjoy the money with them. *Ise lo see dase*, therefore, condemns sharp practices.



Fig. 38: Otio, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 90 cm, 2011.
© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade spent his early years in Oyo traditional setting and the then ghetto Ebute- Meta, Lagos. He had a lot to learn about the dynamism of a society in the grip of unedifying verbal communication. When Onifade often returns to the theme of the dynamics of society, it is not that he is dry of concepts but that it is a proof that the man is

a cultural being, a product of his cultural environment. The artist's *Otio* (Fig. 38) further strengthens the theme of verbosity in *Ipako O Gbo Suti*. *Otio* is a single male bust, which raises his opened hands. The hues of the figure are carefully expressed to make the canvas and the image to achieve unity, coherence and harmony. The Crack-Within-Crack-Stroke from the Three Developmental Styles of *Ara* is evident in this painting. Contextually, *Otio* connotes a man saying no that he has nothing to do with the evil of this world. Man in his environment has fallen prey to the use of evil words because his thoughts are often evil. He finds himself using evil words rather than edifying ones. However, with good understanding of life and courage to it, Onifade here agitates for a positive change, a new order, asking the society to say no to the evil practice of this mundane world.

The painter's crusade for societal reform is very clear in many of Onifade's *Ara* art works to cultural religion such as *Mallam*, The Cleric (Fig. 39). It echoes the theme of reform with verve. The painting is a single male bust and product of Crack-Within-Crack-Stroke from the Three Developmental Styles of *Ara*. The figure, its foreground and background have the same colour hue and intensity yet the image is distinct. It is crafted with short thin lines and deeper hues on the shoulders and a part of the head further to define the image. Aesthetically, the colour intensity of the figure on the left side of the head equals that of the chest area on the side. The deeper intensity on the right side of the head is balanced up with equal intensity on the opposite side of the head /neck/shoulder. Some straps of the headgear also carry this intensity from the head to the chest area. Contextually, *Mallam* is thematically religious. Onifade reacts to the ills of society, using the religious figure, which looks beyond the mundane into the realm of

spirituality from where all helps come. Here, Onifade also reechoes the theme of *Jengbetiele* in which he reveals spiritually man's lack of understanding of his environment, his desire to reorder it in order to be safe. Worthy of note is that *Mallam* represents Onifade's new approach to colour scheme of blue, its value, harmony and application.



Fig. 39: *Mallam* (The Cleric), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 33 cm × 23 cm, 2009.
© Mufu Onifade.

In his school days at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, between 1986 and 1988, Onifaade demonstrates flair for sculpture and painting. His flair for sculpture endears him to his Sculpture Lecturer, Mr. Pam Makanju. This is a feat he maintains in his undergraduate and Masters Programme days at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. Though he majors in painting, Onifade frequently returns to sculpture in his Araism. His *Agba Alejo*, Utmost Hospitality (Fig. 40) portrays this feat again by combining sculptural and painterly styles of expression.

Compositionally, *Agba Alejo* is a two-figure painting crafted with two different styles of expression. The two figures represent tradition and modernity. The female figure in a semi-nude is cubic and offers service in a traditional manner with a traditional basket for tray. She is expressed sculpturally with clearly delineated forms, which transits abruptly. The surfaces of the figure in realism retain the sensory nature of the wood with overall linear effect. The other figure is painterly expressed in stylization. The standing figure is Western. Dressed in English steward's costumes, the figure offers service in English manner. The hues of red and green are laid in straps. Thin lines of black separate one colour from the others. The texture is smooth while the surface is double curve. Depth is hardly noticeable as object behind is bigger than the one in front. However, the colour of the object in front is clearer than the one behind. The female figure in a semi-nude is cubic and employs African proportion.

Conceptually, *Agba Alejo* describes ultimate service that is African. Connotatively, Onifade compares traditional and English services and reflects the transition of tradition into English. The painting, *Agba Alejo*, replicates traditional institutions getting extinct in the name of civilization and Christianity. Apparently, this is

traceable to the efforts of the Western colonial masters to civilize Africans without regard to their institutions, which was not only wrong but also destructive. Though traditional cultural forms still exist in some cultural areas, there are many others where such traditions are eroded, weakened and replaced by new and alien usages or considered as fetish and uncivilized. *Agba Alejo* condemns this and agitates for a return to tradition.



Fig. 40: *Agba Alejo* (Utmost Hospitality), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on Canvas, 134 cm × 76 cm, 2009.
Mufu Onifade.

The Oyo traditional setting in which Onifade was born in October 5, 1966, has a high tradition of native governance led by a king. Chiefs and other officials make up his cabinet. The king and his cabinet command great respect amongst the people. The people show respect to the king in many ways such as paying homage. The king and his entourage also show respect to the ancestors by doing rituals to commemorate them. Among such rituals is the king's majestic dance during traditional festivals in which *Ijala* Chanters, *Iyere* Chanters and *Layewu* Masquerades also feature prominently. The charismatic Onifade, who was born into the family of *Ijala* and *Iyere* Chanters, often reflects the knowledge of this tradition in his *Ara* art. *Okeji Orisa*, His Imperial Majesty (Fig. 41) reflects the tradition of the Oyo people by dropping the woodcarving style for the pure traditional style of *Ara*'s palette and knife painting in crackles, using different shades of colour with Tree-Bark-Effect.

Compositionally, Onifade drapes the images in African regalia. The king and his entourage are engaged in a royal procession under a big umbrella in honour of the ancestors. The king dominates other figures in his entourage. The painting entices one to join the entourage in procession, suggesting movement with their majestic dance steps. Depth is achieved in the painting with aerial perspective, presenting a domineering figure at the centre with lines indicating height descending on both sides. Aesthetically, the painting depends largely on different shades and tints of green and brown, achieving harmony and balance between foreground and top background. The texture is smooth. The surface is double curve made possible with the character of the drapery. The umbrella gives the entire painting a conical overall structure with supporting straight, angular, circular and curve lines.

Contextually, *Okeji Orisa* depicts the place of the royal majesty in the traditional society. Onifade uses the painting to portray a serene traditional society in contrast with a hostile modern society with its modern government. All those factors that hold the people together in a traditional society such as kinship, festivals and taboos seem to be weakened, eroded and replaced by foreign usages in modern society thereby giving way to sharp practices. These invariably translate to unstable society. Onifade, in his characteristic manner of social crusade, enjoins the people to embrace the virtues of tradition. The painting is a success for its colour harmony, unity of composition and balance.



Fig. 41: *Okeji Orisa* (His Imperial Majesty), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 52 cm × 36 cm, 2009.
© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade has a humble beginning. He was born into a family of peasant farmers. He also left his family early to live with his aunt in the ghetto area of Lagos where he was exposed to many poor people. The memory of people, who suffered, especially the homeless, would not fade from him in a hurry. In his *Abarapaa*, The Other Side (Fig. 42) Onifade reflects the less privilege in a society, using a beggar as a model of suffering. Compositionally, *Abarapaa* is one figure composition with motifs of poverty. The male figure sits hopelessly outdoor with cigarette burning in his hand and a plate containing four coins beside him. These were given to him by some good Samaritans. The image that is draped in worn-out clothing and shoes is heavily bearded and frail. At sunset, a building casts shadow on him leaving a flicker of the ray; the grey colour is very dull. Aesthetically, the artist reinforced the message with motifs of worn-out clothes in dull colour and balancing the figure with a plate at the right side of the foreground and thick smoke at the top left side of the background.

Contextually, Onifade uses *Abarapaa* to react to the other side of life in the society where there are beggars, destitute and the homeless in midst of affluence. The artist regrets that, with her abundant natural resources, Nigeria grapples with poverty, lack of adequate medical care, lack of housing facilities and joblessness, which result into the condition that *Abarapaa* represents. Many are faced with the challenges of no home, no job and no hope. Produced in the pure traditional style of *Ara*'s palette and knife painting, *Abarapaa* emphasizes the untidiness of the man; his clothing, shoes, beard, frail looks, and his means of living as it is common with many Nigerians.



Fig. 42: *Abarapaa, The Other Side*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 75 cm × 50 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

The artist is sociologically and culturally a product of his environment. Over the years, artists have worked tirelessly to project their culture. They use their art to record the daily life of the people. Onifade also uses his art to record daily life. *Baby* (Fig. 43), another of Onifade's work devoted to life in the society, explores how society welcomes a newborn baby. Compositionally, he produces *Baby* in circular form. The baby is

squatting at the centre but it is connected to a web of human heads at the top and some letters at the foreground. The baby has a protruding belly with the umbilical cord that connects some letters below. Hues of purple are dominant in the painting. Lines in the painting are a combination of straight, circular, curve and convex.



Fig. 43: *Baby*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 52 cm × 36 cm, 2011.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, Onifade characterizes societal attitude to the newborn baby. Birth connotes peace and progress in African. Childbirth facilitates settlement of dispute among family members and neighbours. It evokes a sense of belonging, blessing and continuum. Onifade wrapped these and many more in the production of *Baby*. Though

the painting is not a portrait, Onifade ignores those formal elements of a scenery composition in the painting but it uses colour harmony, highlight and emphasis, which help to give the message some vigour.

An artist who marries tradition with modernity performs his duties that are tied to the norms of his community. He works in the context of his communal system, which supports its aesthetics and values. He plays his role as a watchdog, one determined to sustain the institutions of his community. Therefore, Onifade sometimes draws his theme from religion to illustrate and reemphasize moral lessons. Onifade juxtaposes biblical injunctions with traditional themes, which he gives African motifs thereby making them African. This juxtaposition is very vivid in *Eewo, Taboo* (Fig. 44). He composes this painting with two human and an animal figure. Two human figures, male and female in the nude, stand on a globe. They are holding hand fans as cover for their private parts. A snake hangs from a branch of a tree above and drops a fruit half eaten. Aesthetically, the painting combines abrupt and smooth transition. Its depth is achieved through light, shade and aerial perspective. The painting emphasizes the fruit with all the figures directing their attention to it. In red and yellow ochre, the fruit is suspended in space with a string from the snake, creating a downward movement. The globe at the foreground is balanced with the snake and branches of tree. The human figures are expressed in woodcarving style with cubic forms. Lines are a combination of straight, rectangle, convex and conical.

Contextually, the painting easily passes for the story of creation involving Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But no. Culture as an established practice prescribes a set of rules, which is binding on members of the cultural area. Taboo emanates from such

prescribed rules. Whoever runs fowl of them have some punishment. Onifade's *Ewo* reveals this connotation, using familiar story of creation but with African motifs. It actually teaches obedience. The fruit represents moral instructions, traditional creeds and institutions, which the people must obey and preserve.



Fig. 44: *Ewo* (Taboo), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 110 cm × 83 cm, 2011.
©Mufu Onifade.

The artist's dogged belief in a moral society is vivid in his art where he assumes the role of a priest and a healer. He uses culture as a moral guide to restore lost glory and

usher in emotional, intellectual and spiritual healing in his community. In *Apere*, Destiny (Fig. 45) Onifade emphasizes the role of culture in a community. Compositionally, the painting is a human head, which was produced in woodcarving style. Each form stands vivid with clear demarcation. Any form that lies side by side, penetrate into, or seems to grow from another is very clear in the manner of expression. The upper eyelid is in form of a plantain leaf on top of an eye that seems to pull out of its socket. The pupil is represented with a hole as if the pupil is chiseled out. The sides of the eyes are chiseled in a v-shape.



Fig. 45, *Apere* (Destiny), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 92 cm, 2011.
© Mufu Onifade.

The nose of *Apere* is a ridge. At one end, it multiplies itself into two conical elevations and at the other; it penetrates into a mountainous forehead, which has some creases. The upper lip has a v-shape at the top and descends on both sides into bearded cheeks. It lies on the lower lip, which rests on an underlying jaw. The ear is a conical growth, which is chiseled in at the middle that runs into the void that connects the side cheek. The forehead penetrates braided head. Sharp lines and straps of colour clearly divide all these forms. The head is set on a canvas of straps of yellowish green. Contextually, *Apere* is the destiny of a man who refuses advice; he must suffer the consequence. It illustrates the cultural saying that the ñear which refuses advice is cut off with the headò. Onifade in his moral lesson believes that man is a cultural being, should abide by his culture and that in it he is safe. The elements such as emphasis, highlight and interplay solid and voids using colour intensity and shade make the painting very interesting.

A sociological being, the artist affects and is affected by society. He takes part in some fundamental functions of his community. He develops his role in society depending on the prevailing socio-cultural and political situation. His art also portrays his role and the way his is affected by society, noting every aspect of the society like Onifade does. Once he shows his interest in any theme, he produces it with high mark of artistry. *Ade Ori*, Crown Head (Fig. 46) depicts how young men struggle to marry a good girl around. The painting is a composition of human figures; the only female is at the centre. The figure is draped under wears. Other figures are in flowing draperies. Aesthetically, Onifade, in the painting, lays emphasis on the female figure, which is also the centre of attraction. The painting depends largely on straight, curve, angular lines and flat colour

straps without anatomical details for effect. The canvas is a web of design, which technically gives depth to the painting.

Contextually, *Ade Ori* portrays marriage as traditional institution. Onifade sees a young decent girl as the ñuntouchedò among other girls. He believes that young men have multitude of interests on her. He also believes that people also say many unconfirmed stories about her. However, a beautiful girl in the village that she is attracts many suitors but only one finally succeeds with her. The crown prince perfectly fits the maiden's head.

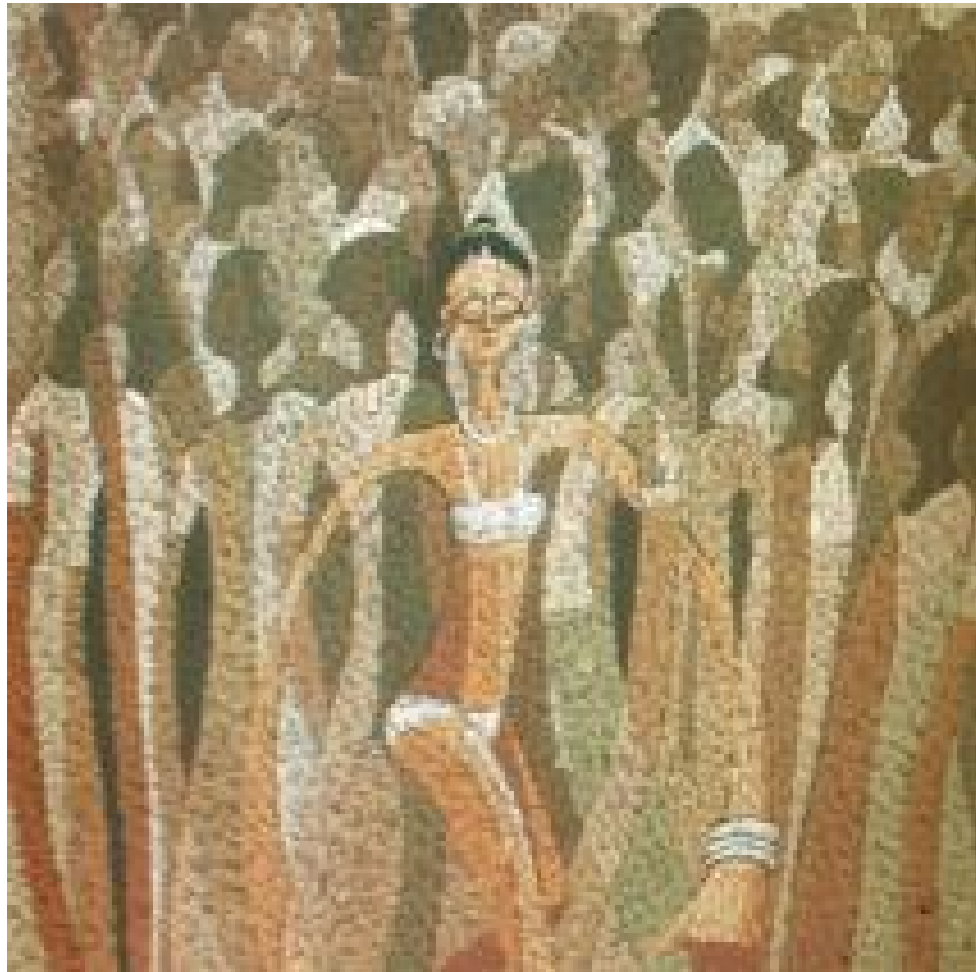


Fig. 46: *Ade Ori* (Crown Head), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 92 cm, 2012.
©Mufu Onifade.

Onifade's doggedness in a moral society runs through his art. His art shows that vices and virtues have punishment and reward respectively. *Ola*, Honour (Fig. 47) portrays the reward of virtue. Compositionally, the painting shows an image that has some link with the object from which it took off. It is composed with a human head with a pendant dangling from it. The small figurehead has a distorted face. It is aesthetically abstracted on a vast canvas of intricate linear design and straps of colour. Its canvas is linear motifs. It shares the characteristics of surrealist painting, which depends on the power of interpretation to concretize its meaning. However, the hues of red, green and off-white, including the composition make the painting fascinating.

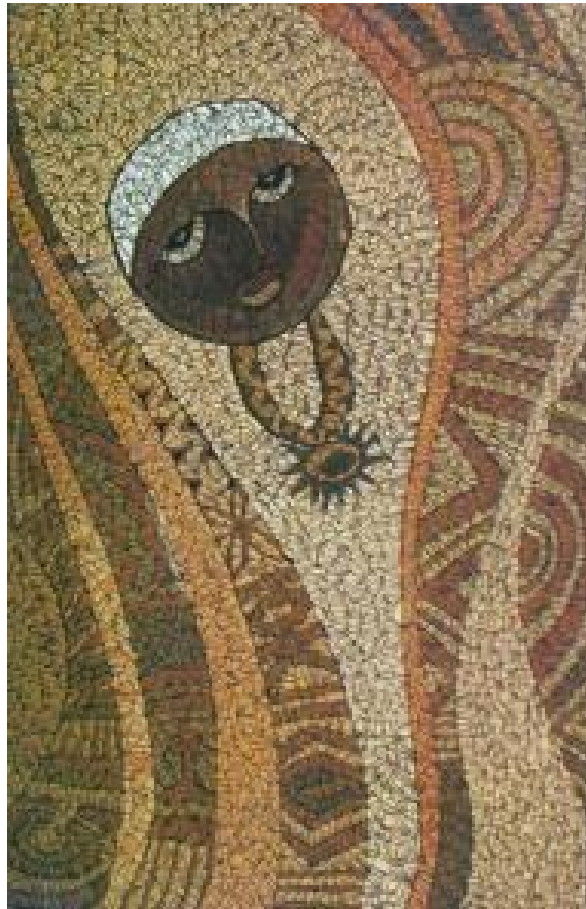


Fig. 47: *Ola* (Honour) Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 48 cm × 24 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

Thematically, *Ola* depicts honour as reward. It shows that honour should be genuinely earned. In a world of rat race anything goes. Men have legalized sharp practices to a point that the dubious ones are getting richer. People kill to live and attain some positions. Some parents are after the life of their children and some children are also after the life of their parents. Some people falsify documents to get to certain places. Examination malpractice has taken over schools. The church is corrupt and cannot raise her head in the comity of nations. There is no justice in the Ministry of Justice. One cannot relay on medical advice. Pharmaceuticals are agents of death through fake drugs. In a country of this sort only honour will do. The artist draws a contrast between genuinely earned honour and ill-gotten one.

Today Onifade is a notable intellectual and an embodiment of creativity. Nonetheless, he does not forget his humble beginning and this is revealing in his *Ara* art. *Ko See Ma Ni*, Inevitable (Fig. 48), depicts the theme of providence. The painting is an abstraction of an image, which claims some link with a bird in space. A silhouette of a bird in space carries a branch of a plant. The red, flat, carpet-like canvas contrasts the white silhouette bird and yellowish green leaves. Aesthetically, Onifade articulates *Ko See Ma Ni* in surrealist mode, giving it a vegetal canvas with a web of design, which technically command depth. The side the bird soars from shows vivid design, which fades gradually towards the rhythmic flow of the bird in space. The hues of blue on the bird also command this mode of rhythmic flow. The large wings of the bird penetrate space in a large curvature; indeed, in opposing shape by deliberately altering the natural frontal convexity to concavity. Breaking the rules further, the artist articulates the legs to drop rather than putting them behind, suggesting wrongly that it is descending. The

display of the bird with its head still penetrating into space, together with the depth in front of it, contrast the mode of perching. Thematically, Onifade explores the theme of providence, avowing that, despite the deplorable condition of man, nature cares for him. The two symbolic objects he uses in this painting do not work before they eat. Both the bird and plant feed from natural source, providence. Onifade's background must have guided him in the course of the articulation of this painting.

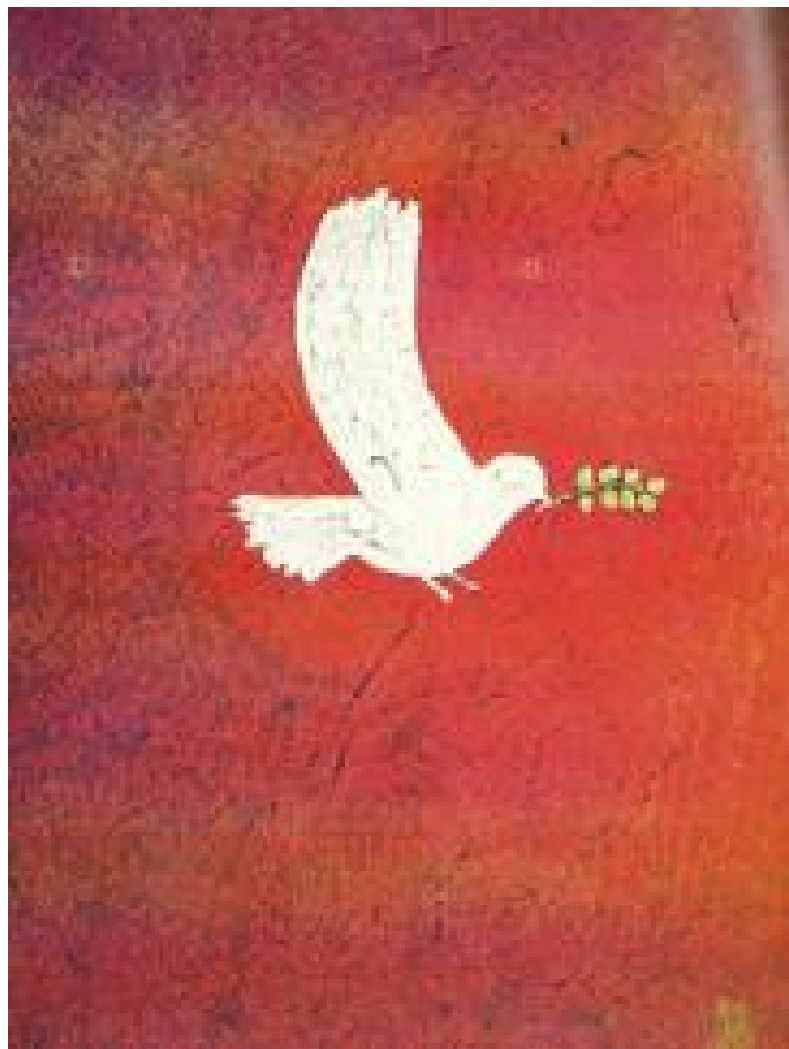


Fig. 48: *Ko See Ma Ni* (Inevitable), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 48 cm × 24 cm, 2012.

© Mufu Onifade.

The memory of the experiences of moonlight in the village is long lasting. To many children, the memory is interesting. Even at adulthood the memory reoccurs. That of Onifade also occurs at adulthood and finds appearance in his art such as in *Osupa Roro*, Moonlight (Fig. 49). He uses *Osupa Roro*, Moonlight, to portray moonlight activity. The composition of the painting is also in a silhouette of human figures and houses in a vast red hilly canvas. The moon that is set at the top right angle seems to have eyes and mouth. The straps of lighter hues invigorate the rhythmic movement in the action of the figures. the houses at the far right hand corner define long hope. The figures face different directions meaning that destination is yet to be determined.



Fig. 49: *Osupa Roro* (Moonlight), Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on canvas, 24 cm × 24 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

Aesthetically, the painting, *Osupa Roro*, reveals strong interplay of the elements of technical execution and thematic idioms, leaving no gap between artistic intent and achievement. The artistry in the painting is masterly. Contextually, the theme of hope is central in the painting. Onifade qualifies the moonlight in darkness as man's succor in crisis; his hope in times of hopelessness, the ray of hope to man after the dark period.

Ara art is also contextually affection. The centrality of affection in *Ara* art defines man's cultural attitude to beauty, correctly deployed in keeping faith with intellectualism. Onifade aptly explores this theme as beautiful female figures, who are either pregnant or in nude with heavy buttocks and are practically romancing. Fatherly care is also an aspect of the symbolism. Mufu Onifade treats this sub-theme culturally, highlighting Yoruba's view about beauty. The Yoruba context of beauty, like many African societies, portrays beauty in two connotations, the physical and the attitudinal. They see physical beauty as structural, the proportional arrangement of forms of the person. On the other hand, attitudinal beauty is intrinsic and cultural. Society defines it. It is about what society approves as virtue. The following Onifade's works of art attest to this claim.

Awelewa, African Beauty (Fig. 50) depicts cultural beauty in the traditional Yoruba worldview. Onifade captures true sense of beauty, using a young female figure as a model. He composes the portrait of a female figure by creating *Awelewa* heavily beaded with plated hair and a wrapper across her chest. This drapery and structure of the forms define Africanness in the figure. Standing in a frontal axis, the image shows physical beauty adorned with ornamentals that are set in smooth sharp light green background. The minor forms on the face transit smoothly on the overall structure.

Aesthetically, *Awelewa* draws attention to structural beauty, emphasizing ornaments. The hair generates a growing movement like a flowering plant. The tread that weaves the hair into loops generates some flow that drops sharply through the ear down to the beads on the neck. The beads on the neck and the ones that hang from it down to the chest form a kind of movement that the wrapper takes over. The intensity of the green on her chest complements that at the background. Movement is suggested with the flow of the ornaments. The painting achieves depth with lines, light and shade.



Fig. 50: *Awelewa* (African Beauty), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 62.5 cm x 42 cm, 2008.

© Mufu Onifade.

Thematically, *Awelewa* portrays beauty in the dialectics of African culture. Reflecting beauty as the title connotes, the image is structurally beautiful. However, its sense of beauty is African that is beyond physical structure. Though Onifade agrees that there is physical beauty, (*ewa*) he believes that inner or attitudinal beauty (*iwa*) is true beauty and it is preferable. He sees a structurally beautiful woman who lacks good character as ugly. To Onifade, therefore, only a virtuous woman that is an embodiment of true beauty. Many Africans share this position, which the traditional marriage institution further defines. It is the hope of many African parents to give their daughters out in marriage. However, it is a bigger hope to wish the daughter/bride behaved well so as not to bring disgrace to the parents. The prayers from the elders to the couple center on obedience from the bride to the groom and this is the climax of the traditional marriage ceremony. It is the hope of both parents of the couple to see the manifestation of the prayer. If it manifests, the bride is beautiful but if not, she is ugly. Onifade is cultural with *Awelewa*.

In addition, central in *Ara* art is the theme of Affection between the child and his parents. Perhaps, this theme is very strong in *Ara* art because affection intrinsically defines life. Onifade became aware of this when he was separated from his parents in 1973 at a very tender age. Like a cow that lost its tail, Onifade soon realized that he lost the affection between him and his family when he left the family in Ponbe for Lagos. He became homesick. This experience is common with many children. *Aayon*, Home Sick (Fig. 51), shows a flashback on the experience of 1973 when he left his parents for Lagos. The painting, which is compositionally a portrait of a young female figure, is a study of the behavior of the human forms in relation to light. A cast of light ray on the

forms alters the way man sees the forms. Working on highlights and shadows through crackles and pigments, the artist is able to distinguish between one form and the other and peculiarity and generality. By this, he is able to achieve resemblance, harmony, high point, emphasis, repetition and rhythm. The treatment of the beads and strands of hair are so naturalistic that one is tempted to pick them off the natural and innocent looking young girl. The floral style of the crackles portrays vacillation of leaves in response to the gentle wind. The overall colour harmony and contrast achieved between the image and the canvas is a show of mastery.

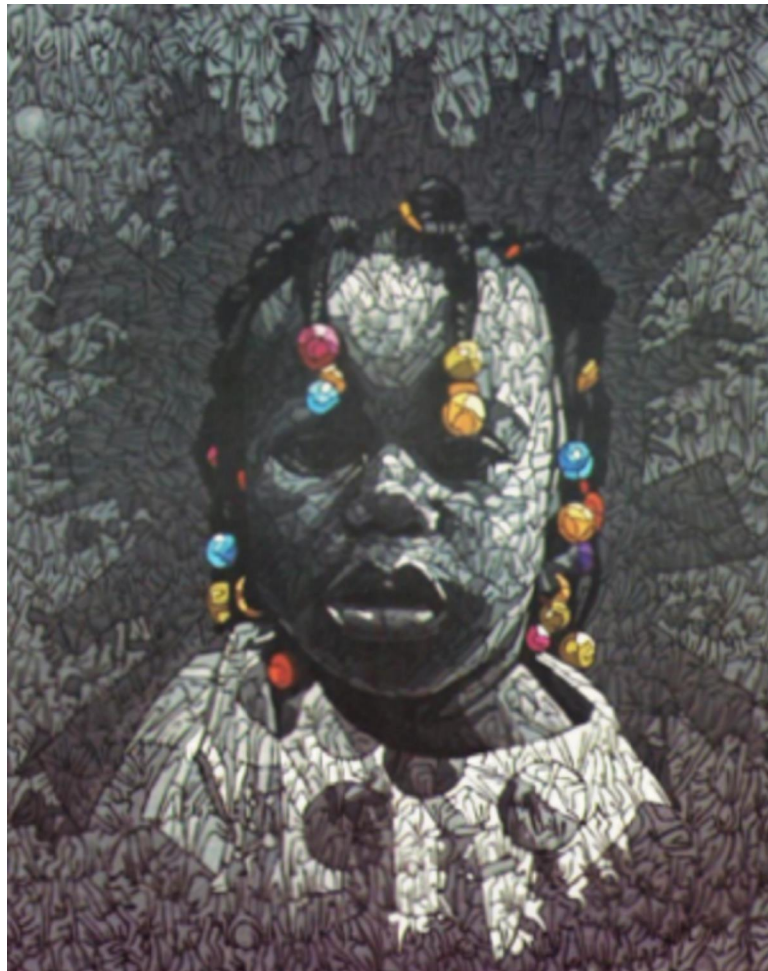


Fig. 51: *Aayon* (Home Sick), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvass, 62.5 cm x 42 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Contextually, Onifade is retrospective with *Aayon* while portraying family affection. The little girl is taken away from her parents. Though she virtually has all that she wants outside the family, she still loses; mother care was missing. Indeed, though the image is of a female it obviously speaks clearly of the beginning of the artist, who was separated from his affectionate family very early in life. The painting has strong a resemblance, balance, harmony and rhythmic flow. The flow of the hair strands, roundness of the beads and the neckline of the dress enhance movement.

Society is drab without affection. Humanity sees romance as an integral part of society. Songs and dance show the centrality of affection in humanity, which *Ara* art also helps to emphasize. Onifade, in his characteristic manner of meticulousness, reveals the strong theme of romance in his *Araism*. *Irepo Dun*, Integration (Fig. 52) delves into romance. He composes this painting with male and female figures that are affectionately entangled. Stylized in geometric shapes, Onifade alters the natural behavior of human forms in *Irepo Dun*. He produces the forms in straps of colour, emphasizing the amorous parts as highlights. He emphasizes the private parts in nudity, creating movement that either start from it or leads to it. The success in the treatment greatly invites the observer to join in the affair. The colours used are just very contextually suitable.

Contextually, Onifade uses *Irepo Dun* to portray affection in society. He captures the mood. Broken by emotion, the female figure seems not to respond practically to the man's caressing gestures. Indeed, she is helpless for she is lost in the blues with her outpouring of emotion suggested by her face in the void, the straps of colour that emerge out of her and the echoes of her bubbles behind their heads. The intent and execution are reconciled in a strong skill of artistry. This is seen in the execution of the affection

between the figures, which wraps them up in the grip of emotion and they are now oblivion of the environment. They are literally in *Ifesowapo*, pocket. However, the man behind the female figure is produced in deep shadow. This can pass for his position but his hand in front of the woman ought to be brighter than the woman is. This is a technical error.



Fig. 52: *Irepo Dun* (Integration), Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on Canvas, 75 cm × 50 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

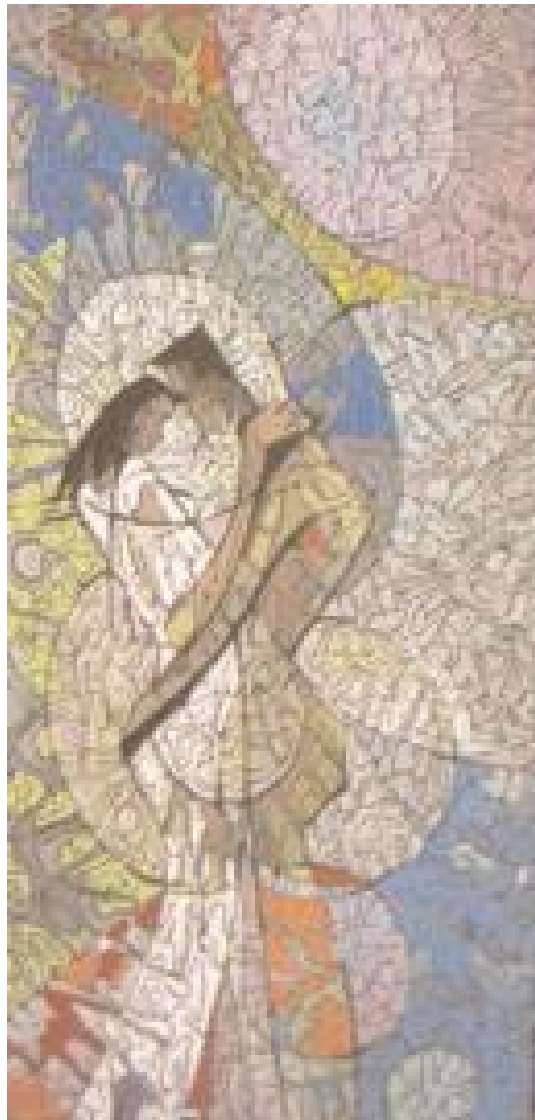


Fig. 53: *Ifesowapo*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 106 cm × 38 cm, 2000.
©Mufu Onifade.

The prominence of the theme of affection in Ara art accounts for many works that portray it. Chronologically, Onifade has been portraying the subject of romance since 2000 as shown by available works. *Ifesowapo* (Fig. 53), which he produced in 2000, depicts affection as romance among the youth. Compositionally, he creates the images of two human figures in a romantic embrace. In astounding pose, the figures seem lost in

heightened emotion. The artist aesthetically articulates the painting in stylization with some geometric shapes. The figures are elongated. He creates depth in the painting with light and shade. In a subdued texture, the images show equal response to each other in affection.

Ifesowapo contextually talks about campus life, the other aspect outside academics. Teaching and learning define academy, but often students are involved in romance. It is pathetic that even some members of staff are caught in the web of campus romance thereby abusing their office. Such issues of abuse of office form part of the decay in the educational sector. This is a cause for great concern. *Ifesowapo* identifies with such tools for social reform in the academy.

The artist is logically critical, using his work spiritually and symbolically to summarize his society. Like the eagle, he sees very clearly and far and like the elephant, his memory is long lasting in the realm of intellectual interpretation of traditions. In this vein, Onifade critically looks at issues of affection in the society; its abuse and bright aspects. He believes that in some cases amorous relations result into pregnancy. A girl transits that stage into womanhood and Araism gives it an interpretation, especially with *Obi O Ju' Bi* (Fig. 54). Reflecting the experience of transition from girlhood to womanhood, Onifade composes a painting using three figures, one female two females. In a very sober mood, the female is almost a full figure while the remaining two who are portrait are indifferent. Aesthetically the artist stylizes these figures; the pregnant image is elongated for emphasis. In frontal and profile axial movements, *Obi O Ju' Bi* shows three figures who exist in different world, symbolized in the parlance of motifs of mood and physique. The textures are subdued and the forms transit smoothly. He uses

elongation and highlight to emphasize the pregnant image. The painting relies heavily on linear effect, colour intensity and rhythm to capture forms that communicate effectively.

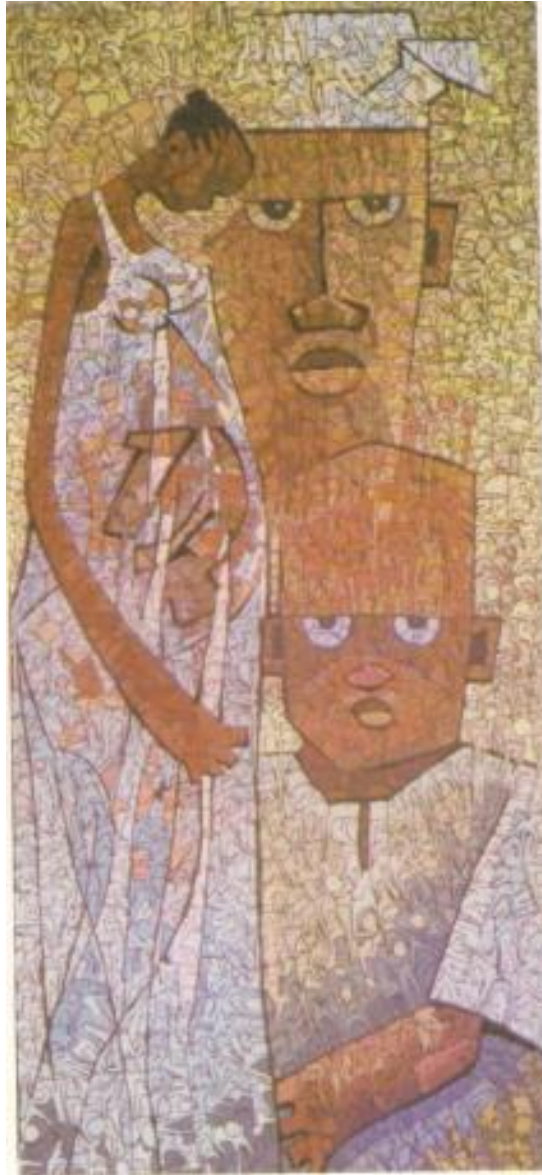


Fig. 54: *Obi O Ju' Bi'*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 107 cm × 38 cm, 2003.
© Mufu Onifade.

Thematically, *Obi O Ju' Bi* symbolizes ñObi O Juô Biò, meaning kola pass kola, captures amorous abuse. Immorality has taken over the society. The decent one is considered a weakling. Honesty is believed to be stupidity. Many secondary school age

girls today are mothers. Some girls drop out of the primary school when pregnant. Some married women in the society have extra marital affairs. Some have become diabolical about it in order to avoid the consequence. The painting reveals the result of such affection (pregnancy), which is more than the ordinary. Here, the girl is not sure of who impregnated her between the two men. She dates the two simultaneously. Already, the two men are married to other women and that this affection with the girl is meant to be just ordinary affair. Meanwhile, while she is sober the men are not. However, agreeing with Onifade, this *Obi O Ju' Bi* is ñObi O JuôBiò, kola actually has past kola.

Natural affection exists between fathers and their children. This is very clear, especially a father loses a child; he becomes emotionally broken, sometimes sobbing and at other times actually weeping. However, men do not only show affection in times of grief but also in times of childcare. Araism records this aspect of humanity, taking note of the love that fathers show to their children. The study of *Ara* art shows that this theme is very strong in it. *Baba Ni Digi*, Sweet Father (Fig. 55) strongly exemplifies this experience with a composition of two figures, a man backing a child. In a standing pose, the two figures are closely linked with a strong gaze from the father to the child who holds the former tenaciously.

The artist aesthetically stylizes the figures in *Baba Ni Digi* with geometric shapes in subdued textures. However, the images have abrupt transition. Cubic in form, the forms are presented in squares, triangles, oval and rectangles, carefully using shades of colour with tiny straps of grey as dividing lines. He creates the canvas as carpet in shades of brown, which are separated from one another by tiny lines of grey, and crackles within. Thematically, *Baba Ni Digi* reflects the affection between the father and child,

playing a maternal cultural role. The artist is here advocating that men should sometimes help their wives with the demand of the home. He believes that such help brings the couple closer and that it will be a good example to the children. Implicitly, however, *Baba Ni Digi* makes a strong statement on what men face when their wives die prematurely. The husband takes over the role of the wife when she dies. It is more pathetic and her role very tasking on the husband if she was a nursing mother. *Baba Ni Digi* implies such experiences. Overall, the painting is successful for its colour harmony and unity of patterns.



Fig. 55: *Baba Ni Digi* (Sweet Father), Mufu Onifade, mixed media, 50 cm × 40 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.



Fig. 56: *Transition*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

The theme of transition from girlhood to womanhood is central in Araism. The centrality is seen in its echo and reechoes in many *Ara* works but with different artistic treatment, variance in hues and value, composition and aesthetics. Though the subject may be similar such introduced variations, which are novel speak volume to the sensibility of the observer. Laced with such pleasant variations, *Transition* (Fig. 56) composed with a pregnant female figure in the nude, reechoes transition from girlhood

into womanhood explicit in *Obi O Ju' Bi*. Onifade aesthetically produces the seated figure in back axial plane of reference. She stretches out her legs, balancing herself with two hands on the floor, which are by her sides. Her hair that is stylized into one strand falls back down her waist. This contrasts another highlight of light purple round the bust. Onifade further highlights this with circles in lighter hues of purple. Contextually, the painting conveys the theme of childbearing. The mood depicts pain in labour.

Transition reveals the mystery of pregnancy, wishing that every woman should bear children. Implicitly, the artist alludes to the biblical pronouncement on Eve who disobeyed God and shall experience pains in labour for disobedience. In a very painful mood, the image weeping and seems to say when shall the pain be over. In empathy, an onlooker will join the experience, gnashing teeth and weeping with pain. Chronologically, the painting shows a shift from brown to red and blue as Onifade's new colour scheme. The painting also depends on rhythmic flow of circles, circular lines, colour harmony and value for success.

In furtherance to exploration into affection, Onifade delves into reflecting the bond between a mother and her child, using the model of a nursing mother. *Nursing Mother* (Fig. 57) that captures the knot is compositionally a nursing mother in semi-nudity with a baby breastfeeding. The artist aesthetically stylizes the figures, highlighting a part of the mother and the baby who is breastfeeding in a circle tinted purple. He seats the figures in circular straps of high intensity of hues, which is toned down with a web of deep sweet blue. While the mother enfolds the baby in a warm embrace, the child sucks breasts that are created to serve as center of attraction. A nipple seems to grow from very succulent and full breast, which defines further the growing structure of the breasts. The

underlying structure is cast in the mould of an overall rhythmic flow. While the right hand suggests a broken circle necessitated by the left hand that grips the baby the head creates the feel of a structure penetrating into space. The drapery rises from the floor at the right hand side, finds its peak under the armpit and plunges into a deep steep down the right leg. This leg breaks the movement that should have resulted into a complete circle. The left leg folds and lies under the right but ends up showing the foot that defines the end of the movement. The dominant purple in the painting helps to define a new colour scheme and a baby born into the family of the greats.



Fig. 57: *Nursing Mother*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 100 cm × 61 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

Thematically, Onifade uses *Nursing Mother* to convey the experience of childbearing. It aptly captures the satisfactory mood of successful child delivery. The sucking child points to good health. The mother is assured that her position in the family is now consolidated with the child. Onifade seems to say congratulation with *Nursing Mother*. The painting is a version of life transformation, from pregnancy to delivery. The girl suddenly grows a protruding abdomen with other features changing accordingly. This condition persists for about nine months and at last, a child is born. Aesthetically, this painting, which depends on rhythmic flow of circles, circular lines, colour harmony and value for success with variegated meanings, also marks Onifade's shift from brown to red and blue.

Onifade's interplay of moonlight and affection is very revealing in *Ara* art. He knows the importance of moonlight to children in the village. In the traditional Oyo setting where Onifade grew up, the children play in groups at moonlight. *Tan Mos Oko* (Fig. 58) captures this experience. The artist composes the painting using two naturalistic female figures that play in the moonlight. He makes the large moon cast shadow on the deep blue foreground. The painting has aerial perspective that makes one figure larger than the other does. The artist uses composition and colour to appeal to emotion. The circular moon in yellowish green is linked with the deep green in the background and foreground through the combination of yellow and deep green in the human figures. The artist perfectly casts the shadows of the figures on the foreground, showing the source of light and the reaction of figure to it. Contextually, affection is explicit in the painting with the figures engaged in a cultural dance and instrumentation, pouring their inner soul to

the outside world. Onifade must be expressing his free world as a child in Ponbe compound, Ponbe town in Atiba Local Government Area, Oyo.



Fig. 58: *Tan Mos Oke*, Mufu Onifade, tempera on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm, 2004.
© Mufu Onifade.

A man is affectionate with himself. His experiences sometimes play back in his dream. To some people, dreams serve as a guide while to others, mere hallucination. Onifade thinks along the line that dreams serve as a guide. *Asunji*, Dreamland (Fig. 59) delves into dream-like painting. It is composed with linear expressions, using single lines and silhouette in circular straps to create the form of a reclining female figure. Onifade

produces the single lines in such a way that they leave the illusion of volume. *Asunji* technically combines the three developmental styles, Flat-Tone-Strokes (crackles), Crack-Within-Crack-Strokes and the Tree-Bark-Effect, of *Ara*, emphasizing the pubic and bust areas. Circles of deeper hues as the seat of dreams emphasize the head. Contextually, *Asunji* portrays dream as part of humanity. The artist believes that dreams influence largely man's thinking and way of doing things. Of course, people often refer to dream in their verbal expression, which Onifade documented in painting. Onifade expresses the painting successfully with the use of colour harmony, emphasis, highlight, rhythmic linear flow and unity between the image and the canvas.



Fig. 59: *Asunji* (Dreamland), Mufu Onifade, mixed media, 122 cm × 46 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Ara structurally uses three styles that dominantly sum up Araism. indeed, there are individual styles in Araism. However, they all take off from these three developmental styles. *Details of Asunji*, Dreamland (Fig. 60) is another version of *Asunji*, Dreamland, which combines these three styles in a clear divisions with each represent a style. The top part is Flat-Tone-Strokes (crackles). Compositionally, this part of Flat-Tone-Strokes (crackles) shows the female bust in the nude reclining. The bust is divided

into two with two straps of deep purple in circle. This part of the bust in the circle is in the deepest hue of purple to show night when dreams mostly take place. The crackles here are refined and smaller. The next part (middle part) is Crack-Within-Crack-Strokes. This part is compositionally the torso of the female figure in the nude.



Fig. 60: *Details of Asunji (Dreamland), Mufu Onifade, mixed media, 122 cm × 46 cm, 2010.*
© Mufu Onifade.

The crackles are a bit coarse and bolder than the ones in the top part expressing the bust. The remaining part is the Tree-Bark-Effect, which is boldest and whose crackles

lie side by side. As the name suggests, this style has strong resemblance with the structure of the bark of a tree. Onifade's reference to trees in his *Ara* art owes largely to his cultural environment. His village, Ponbe, is in the heart of the forest region where his parents were farmers. As a little boy he and his other brothers and sisters were accompanying his parents to the farm. Additionally, Oyo is known for growing fruit trees. Onifade's compound, Ponbe, also had these fruit trees. Onifade was in the mist of trees. Therefore, the influence of trees in *Ara* art is environmental.

From the paintings above, *Ara* art focuses largely on traditional Yoruba cosmology and aesthetics, using *Ara* style as expressive channel. Nonetheless, *Ara* art also highlights general social themes such as education and architecture. The wide themes of *Ara* art portray Araism a total crusade for socio-cultural reform, using models of different poses, traditional motifs and the dialectics of artistic textures in crackle effect as weapon. *Ori*, Seat of Power (Fig. 61) aptly captures this context as a pointer to education, which is a source of power. Compositionally, this painting uses linear expressions in their single form and colour to produce a human figure reading a book in a reclining position. A web of lines in circular highlights represents the head. A triangular ray emerges from the book and runs through the head to a vanishing point. Another circular highlight less in intensity and size is at the loin area. Aesthetically, the single line leaves the illusion of volume. The articulation of the book, the ray and the head help to create depth and emphasis in the painting. The image in yellowish green and the deeper yellowish green canvas are inseparable due to careful blending. The value of the triangular ray balances that of the circular value at the loin area.

Contextually, *Ori* conveys the message of education, which is a source of light to humanity. *Ori* emphasizes human head as the seat of knowledge acquired from books, the symbol of education. The theme of education is explicit in Onifade's *Ara* art because education makes him who he is today. His training from Primary school through secondary to the university today culminates in Onifade as a literary and artistic giant in the country. Critically, *Ori* also uses *Asunji's* style of linear expression to achieve success with emphasis, highlight and rhythmic linear rendition.



Fig. 61: *Ori* (Seat of Power), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 55 cm × 45 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

One of the primary functions of art is to entertain. However, humanity uses the visual arts to progressively illuminate social relations and enlighten people in the society. Artists deploy visual arts to carry out a linguistic message. Education, which is heavily linguistic, also employs visual art to communicate and demonstrate its curriculum. Onifade is very much aware of these functions of art and he utilizes them. Therefore, little

children in school remind Onifade of his early school experiences, which he copies into *Ara* art. *Jelesinmi*, Kindergarten (Fig. 62) captures the theme of education, Onifade's early days in school. The painting portrays an image of a little boy in realism. The little boy in his school uniform carries his school bag in one hand and another bag in the other. While the little boy reminds the artist of his early school days experiences, the boy, to him, is also a metaphor of modernity, carrying with it all the luxuries that were never had or seen. In the early school days of the artist, school uniform was hardly provided and it was available, it was worn out and torn. School run is a modern terminology. Pupils covered miles while trekking to school; no biscuits, no lunch box and no water flask.

Aesthetically, *Jelesinmi* emphasizes school uniform, which is in the variations of hues of purple. His light purple shirt is harmonized with its stockings of equal purple intensity. The deep purple in the shorts also matches with that of the bag. The foreground, background and the shirt give the illusion of a vegetative carpet. The painting suggests movement with the neck and hands. The neck is tilted to the right side. The right hand stretches with the weight of the bag, giving the illusion of an arrow pointing to the bag. The left hand, which penetrates into space, is half suspended. If a line is drawn from the hand to the shoulder, the shape will form a triangle. The left hand and the bag serve to balance the weight of the bag in the right hand. Contextually, *Jelesinmi* depicts the theme of education, emphasizing early age education. Implicitly, however, *Jelesinmi* reveals children's love for food. To the kindergartener, the school bag has less value than his food container, which he carries affectionately. Indeed, the painting relies on colour harmony, draughtsmanship and communicative power to achieve success.

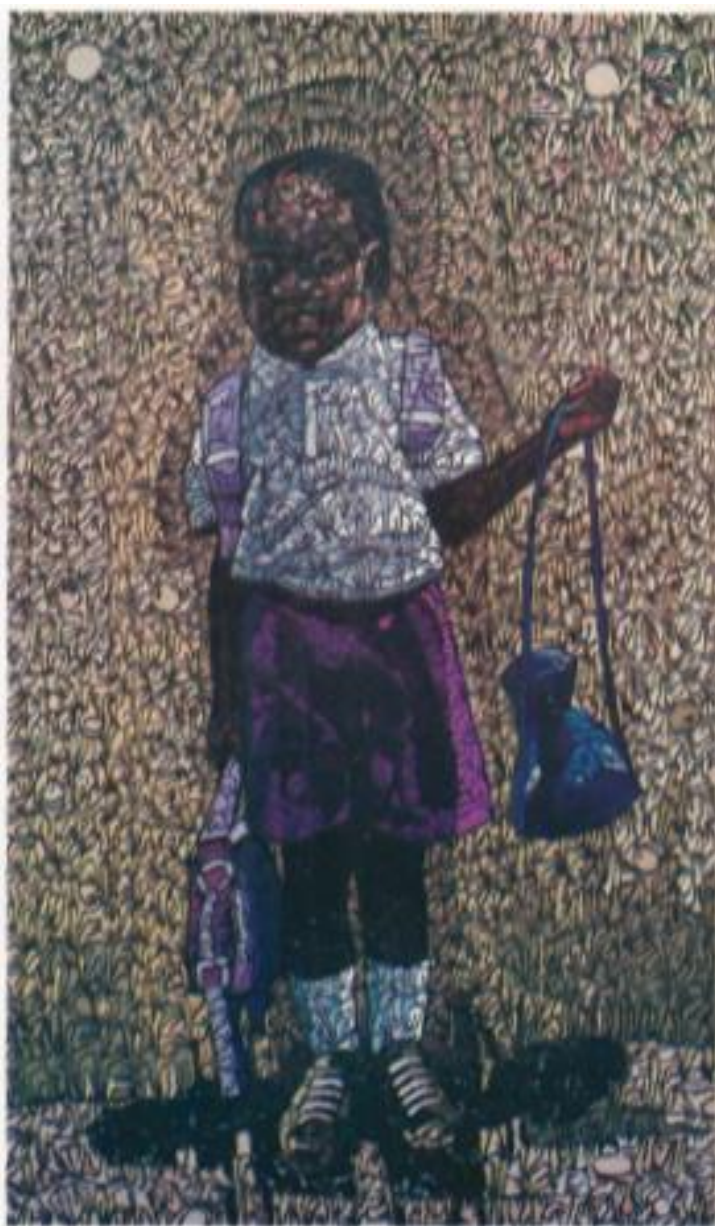


Fig. 62: *Jelesinmi* (Kindergarten), Mufu Onifade,
acrylic on canvas, 78 cm × 45 cm, 2009.
© Mufu Onifade.

Man and his sense of time are inseparable. Humanity attaches time to events and come up with such slogan as *ñtime waits for nobody*ò. If he is ahead of time, he complains that time is slow, but if he is behind time schedule, he exclaims, *ñhow time flies*ò. *Ara* art also captures this human experience with regard to time. *Asiko Laye*,

Philosophy of Time (Fig. 63) portrays man and his sense of time. The painting captures this phenomenon using a symbolic clock. It is composed of a symbolic clock labeled figures 12, 3 and 6, a tortoise and human figures who are engaged in different activities, using yellowish green and light green as dominant colours. The painting is broadly divided into two horizontally with 12 and 6, each phase significant to the philosophy of time. Contextually, Onifade uses *Asiko Laye* to depict the essence of time in humanity. He believes that time is independent of man even though man is completely attached to it. Not many are masters of time yet people work with it every day, expecting its reward.



Fig. 63: *Asiko Laye* (Philosophy of Time), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 153 cm × 92 cm, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Outside education, Onifade shows a great tendency in articulating environment. Different places are fascinating to him when he travels. His experiences in South Africa did not escape his palette knife and canvas. *Arambara*, In One Day (Fig. 64) captures the changing weather in South Africa. The artist creates the painting in four sections with straps of hues for each section. Each strap articulates a human figure naturalistically to

engage in a certain action. In the painting, two straps of green enclose those of yellow ochre and greenish purple. The first strap portrays an action of wind and its effect, using the figure of a man who struggles with his umbrella distorted by wind. The second strap shows a sunning day with the intensity of the sun and a corresponding female figure in brassiere and mini skirt. The next strap indicates rainfall and its effect, using a woman under the cover of an umbrella in a dull background. The last strap shows a very cold evening whether, using a human figure completely covered with clothing in a darker atmosphere.



Fig. 64: *Arambara (In One Day)*, Mufu Onifade, acrylic on Canvas, 90 cm × 90 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

Aesthetically, *Arambara* emphasizes the element of weather. In the first strap, the figure is in silhouette, leaving out all anatomical details. The bright green reveals the

silhouette and its struggle with the shadowy umbrella. Other sections are similarly treated. The figures in section 1 and 2 are in profile. That in section 3 is in back axis. The figure in the last section is in frontal axis. The painting achieves balance with the arrangement of the triangular straps. Contextually, *Arambara* reveals the changing weather and man's response within a day. All these are the changing different weathers in one day, which Mufu Onifade experiences during his three-month Residency Programme at Greatmore Art Studios, Cape Town, South Africa. *Arambara* pays more attention to colour and effect of weather than the anatomy of the human figures.

The environment appeals to art in many ways, sometimes it is the scape while at other times, it is its responses to man's action. Onifade meticulously captures architecture in its responses to man. He lives in Lagos, works in Abuja and travels overseas. This naturally exposes him to metropolitan cities where there are ultra-modern buildings and landscapes. In a swift, Onifade uses his *Ara*, such as *Awosifila*, Metropolitan Cape (Fig. 65) to capture architecture in the cities. *Awosifila* clearly portrays Onifade's artistry and interest in modern buildings and landscape. In the architectural painting, he creates buildings and human figures in a section of a thickly populated urban area. The building in brown separates two areas of green. Some of the human figures are also costumed in green. Onifade creates depth in this painting with aerial perspective. The painting is successful for its large linear effect and colour harmony.

Contextually, *Awosifila* reports through painting technological advancement that leads to environmental change. With reinforced concrete and iron, buildings have many storey, penetrating deeply into and enfolding space. Houses use glass doors and windows, which do not only reduce weight but also provide transparency to light. Iron and

concrete form the major materials of modern architecture. The improvements in concrete, iron and steel affected architecture favourably. This was not possible until the period of modern architecture, which started in 19th and 20th century. *Awosifila* documents all these.

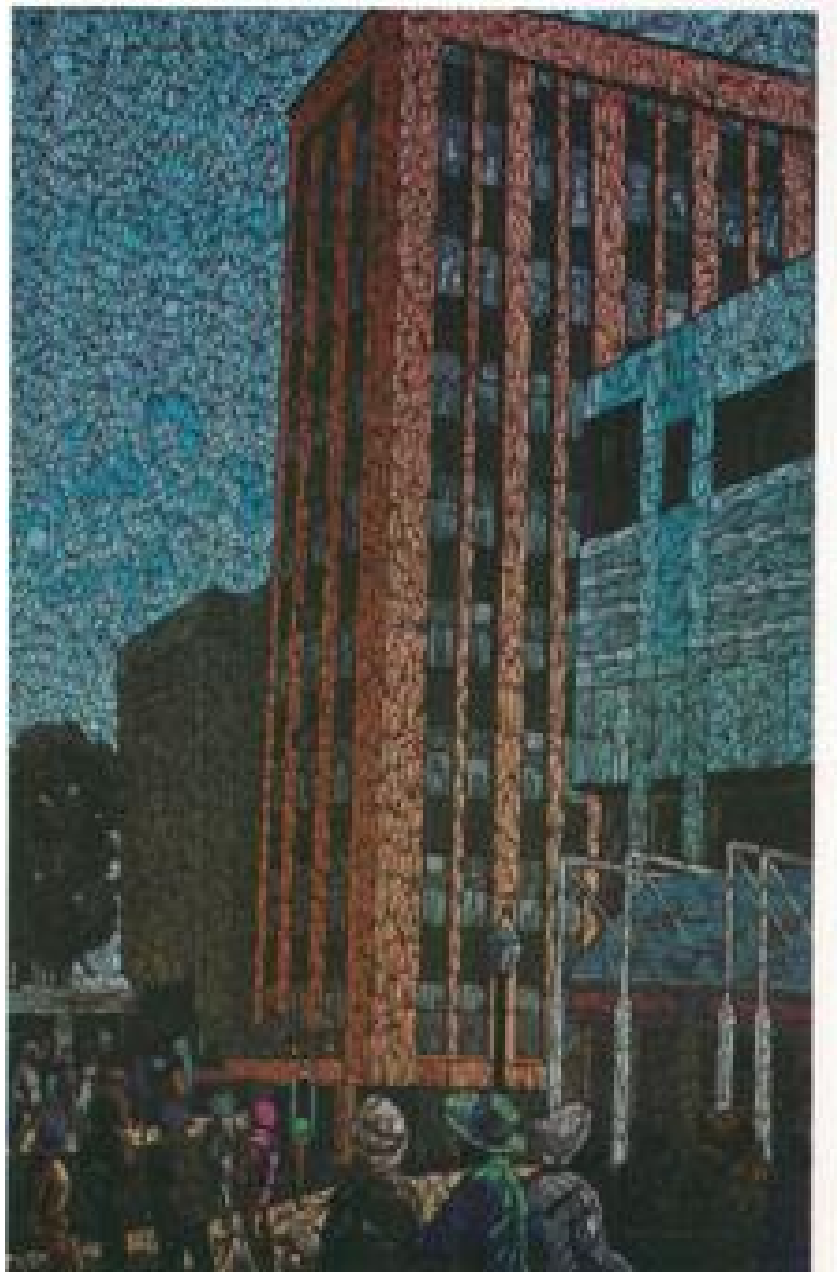


Fig. 65: *Awosifila* (Metropolitan Cape), Mufu Onifade, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2010.

© Mufu Onifade.

From the selected works of art above, the tone of *Ara* art is set unequivocally in the beginning. The chief goal of *Ara* art is to preserve and disseminate Yoruba culture and, by extension, her worldview. It is not in doubt that the works of Araism are in a crusade for reform. It is not also in doubt that Araism is clearly a social force, which uses as a weapon the purity of forms and colours articulated to have a great feel of emotionality, symbolism, intellectualism and spiritualism to achieve a new world. It is also vivid that Araism is in the duty of wakening the Yoruba community and by extension the Nigerian society to ethical and religious values. From the study, *Ara* art style is characteristically total in its crusade for a new order.

Thematically, *Ara* art is the mouthpiece of the Yoruba culture, especially those good aspects of the culture that bind the people together in communal thought. The themes are very clear as the mythology of a people who sees reward for virtue and punishment for evil. Although individuals vary with critical sensibility Onifade's paintings provide the viewer with a web of variegated meanings, all of which engage the weaponry of a social change for a new order. The temperament of his themes draws excessively from African orality and particularly the Yoruba in Nigeria. This is in recognition of traditional Africa as a continent of large, old-age, continuing and functional creativity with respect to orality as the totality of communal life, dogma, ideology and aesthetics. In her 'Africa and Orality' in *African Literature, an Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, Liz Gunner proposes a position for African orality as a language, which by extension legitimizes Onifade's thematic temperament:

Orality needs to be seen in the African context as the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organized their present and their pasts, made formal spaces for philosophical reflections, pronounced on power, questioned and in some cases contested power,

and generally paid homage to ñthe word,ò language, as the means by which humanity was made and constantly fashioned.²¹

The orality of *Ijala* (hunter's tonal poetry), *iremoje*, *iyere* chants and the artistic *Layewu*, which the Egungun traditional festival deploys as its embellishment, interlace personal, lineage and communal history that provide a poetic vehicle for the Yoruba as a people. The forms of this oral poetry recreate the past in the present and ñmake possible the crossing from the world of the dead to the world of the living, making the past present againò.²² He presents the performers as the vast and the envy of the hinterland of cultural knowledge. The artist portrays these forms of oral poetry through the works as the ñheartbeatò of the Yoruba royalty, revealing the centrality of the king in the community.

Furthermore, the works reveal virtue as a divine element of reward and vice as punishment. In this sense, Onifade uses the works effectively as a reformer and weapon for social change, creating a new order that his other sub-themes amplify. The cultural themes are receptive as a mode of communication ñhoned to fit a myriad of different social, ideological, and aesthetic needs in many different societies on the continentò.²³ This is to prove that the cultural themes accommodate his and other social, educational and modernity sub-themes that fall within the different social, ideological, and aesthetic needs of other societies. Wole Soyinka reviews the place of Obatala and Ogun deities in the thematic textures of Yoruba traditional arts. His ñThe Forth Stage: (Through the Mysteries of Ogun¹ to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy)ò in *African Literature, an Anthology of Criticism and Theory* characterizes traditional Yoruba art in relation to moral appreciation and, by extension, sums up the temperament of Onifade's *Ara* art themes:

Yoruba traditional art is not ideational however, but ñessentialò. It is not the idea (in religious arts) that is transmitted into wood or interpreted in music or movement, but a quintessence of inner being, a symbolic interaction of the many aspects of revelations (within a universal context) with their moral apprehension.²⁴

Wole Soyinka characterizes Ogun by associating it with Hellenic values as the totality of Dionysian, Appolonian and Promethean virtues. He reveals the distorted myths of Ogun's terrorist reputation, but that traditional poetry still record him as ñprotector of orphansò, ñroof over the homelessò, terrible guardian of the sacred oathò, and that Ogun ñstands for transdental, humane but rigidly restorative justiceò. He describes Obatala as the ñplacid essence of creation; Ogun the creative urge and distinct, the essence of creativityò and cites the traditional poem as support:

Rich-laden is his home, yet decked in palm fronds
 He ventures forth, refuge of the down-trodden,
 To rescue slaves he unleashed the judgment of war
 Because of the blind, plunged into forests
 Of creative herbs, Beautiful One
 Who stands bulwark to offsprings of the dead of heaven?
 Sal lone being, who swims in rivers of blood.²⁵

Stylistically, however, Mufu Onifade creates works of art with some peculiarities, which add up to his individual style, Araism; a unique and new style in the dialectics of artistic parlance. The character of his individual style is woodcarving style of expression and painterly style in an overall Araism. The works show that in the beginning of Ara art, Onifade sometimes used woodcarving style in painting. In fact, he sometimes veered away from it but often returned to the style. When using this style, he deploys forms aesthetically in staccato or abrupt transition, delineated sections, circular and angular straps as planes of reference to bind the entire painting together. He articulates the

surfaces of the works to show dexterity of curvilinear, concavity, voids, holes and warp in a combine subdued and rough textures. All these add up to give the illusion of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional space, thereby creating a fascinating feel of sculpture.

When he uses the painterly approach in an overall *Ara* art style, Araism, his forms are more relaxed in smooth transition in a priceless frame of high colour values. The use of double curve and warp surfaces in the works are decisively Araism. Aerial perspective is absent in some of the scape paintings, which but gives way to volumetric perspective to capture depth. This is also the decisively master approach to painting that is dominant in *Ara* art.

Very revealing in his art style is the painstaking manner, strong and humanly themes dressed in aesthetics, which provide the satisfaction that a work of art can yield with variety of meanings. In other words, the works are expressive in structure but instrumental in content. Structurally, the works have the ability to communicate ideas and feelings very vividly. To Onifade, his art achieves his purpose not minding their formal character that ought to seek to achieve correctness of individual forms in an overall structure. However, in the nature of his art as instrumentalist, the content seeks to advance the traditional Yoruba cosmology with a little diversification into secularities of metropolitan complexity and some other cultures.

As his *Ara* art reveals, Onifade is not much concerned with solving the problems associated with sensory of materials rather he is concerned with what the material can do for him. He, therefore, uses pigments to elicit his chosen traditional motifs such as the Sango axe, Sango fetish contents, protective charms, the Iroko connotation, the fire horse

and regalia to tell about the Yoruba as a people. The artist creates all these wonders with canvas and hues that are not only fascinating but also rewarding. Even with the chronological shift in colour scheme, one finds it difficult to make a choice; not that one's sensibility is weak, but that one's sensibility finds equal pleasure and delight in all.

At any chronological period, Onifade committedly deploys the ductility of colour to give the semblance of life. The deployment agrees with Delacroix's Diary that colour gives the semblance of life, a view that was earlier upheld by Plutarch in the second century A.D.²⁶ The works present colour and drawing in serious competition of supremacy as to which is more or less stimulating. Critically, the works generate serious debate about the relative importance of colour and drawing. There is no doubt that colour and line drawing can exist separately in their own aesthetical merit. However, by the artist's organization of colour and line quality, their aesthetic values are relative. The argument of relative importance, which the works present on the one hand, seems to favour colour rather than drawing that it is life-like and that it creates an illusion; what drawing seems to be less capable of doing. This position is traceable to one of David's studio critiques in the late 1790s to his student, Georges, thus:

That's what it is to like German music, you prefer harmony to melody and you do the same in painting: you put drawing after colour. Well, my friend, that's putting the cart before the horse.²⁷

In practical term, Onifade's articulates the linguistics of colour in the works to draw inspiration from the past. Such relative difference and importance as they concern colour and line drawing in the works had greatly been observed in some works of art in the nineteenth century. Academic activities particularly in the Western world in the

nineteenth century took a position between colour and drawing. Though there was serious argument concerning the relativity of colour and drawing a school of thought believes that colour is sensual and that such sensuality bars it from a major claim to beauty, which consists not in colour, but in shape (drawing outline). This school of thought reveals that colour is a gift of nature, which a genius manifests and that unlike drawing it is not taught and not controllable. It also reveals the moral dimension of colour, which Onifade reflects in his *Ara* art, characterizing colour as a seductive whore while drawing was the chaste Madonna. Another of David's student, Ingres, echoed this position. He observes that "drawing comprises everything, except tint; colour adds adornment to painting but it is only the tiring woman, because all she does is make the true perfection of art more amiable"²⁸

From the works and the arguments, Onifade assigns gender quality to colour and drawing. He portrays colour as feminine, sensual and flirtatious, appealing to the emotions with the charm that is capable of distraction. Therefore, this innate charm can distract both the artist and viewer from the "masculine purity of intellectual and spiritual values, the true realm of art." Onifade is, therefore, creative with lines, especially with colour, giving them a fresh model of linguistic dialectics with *Ara* crackles. Though the artist uses colour primarily for representation as descriptive property, it is very clear that he extends the ambit of colour to expressive stance where it directly appeals to the viewer's spirituality.

Though the paintings above appear in colour, their forms take their roots from drawing. Onifade uses the works clearly to reflect drawing as the dependability and truthfulness of art, showing the receptive virtue of drawing in contrast to colour. Indeed,

the works align themselves to the long academic tradition of a moral dimension concerning the centrality of drawing in visual arts. The works seem to clearly assert that everything about painting begins with drawing. David's student in the nineteenth century aptly captures drawing thus:

Over three quarters of what constitutes painting is comprised of drawing. If I had to put a sign above any door I would write: "School of Drawing", and I'm sure that I would produce painters.²⁹

The *Ara* paintings assign aesthetic value to drawing, thereby giving it the rationality, spirituality, intellectuality and austerity of expression. The works further define the union of drawing and colour to produce a painting while portraying drawing as fundamental to and preparatory for painting. The works highlight the robust function of drawing to painting and, by extension, sculpture, owing to the prominence of the use of sculptural style of expression in the *Ara* painting.

Composition in *Ara* works of art above reemphasizes the art of painting, which fundamentally consists in expressing the appearance of mass of figures and objects on a two-dimensional space. The artist attempts to redefine composition through the works as an artistic language that he dramatically employs to express his thought visually. Therefore, Onifade articulates composition in the parlance of linguistics to transmit thoughts to others through some rules he prescribes for himself. He deploys composition as a product of genius, which interlaces with colour and drawing to serve as a summation of his traditional Yoruba worldview through *Ara* art. The composition conveys action motifs that are sometimes theatric in their parts and whole as expressional structures. Articulating composition as the means and the language, which uses symmetry, unity,

harmony, coherence, clarity, variety and emphasis of expression, Onifade communicates his thoughts effectively through *Ara* art.

The works above portray anatomy as a divine element of composition. They show the full potential of anatomy in the expression of visual experience. Onifade characteristically uses the human figure as the basis of drawing and that anatomy defines its physique. He uses man as a primary vehicle to convey ideas by his traits and forms. The works attempt to characterize man in his response to stimuli, judging his mood and interpreting the action that results from it. The works reveal that it is the duty of the artist to capture man's cause and effect. To capture the anatomy correctly, Onifade applies his works to man whose bones are underlying structures of forms and who moves his bones with muscles and tendons. In the same vein, he captures man as the underlying structure of drapery whose action defines its rhythmic flow, all of which culminate into delight.

The overall structure of the works and their impact on the viewers give some pleasure and delight in the vigorous pursuit of a new social order. The pleasurable effect of the works is in the pictorial unity, coherence and grandness of textures in the relationships between planes of crackles of tint and shade. The effect of the works pressurizes the viewers to have the feel that the truth of *Ara*, ñwonderò, exists in *Ara* art with a grip of the motifs of the dialectics of human history. Indeed, great art is its great effect except all art works are the same. Retaining the character of the overall symphony and purity of the sketch, despite the details of crackles in different hues, makes the works unique and great with a cajoling effect. Certainly, the quality of conveying the character of the subject is masterly. The study, therefore, agrees to ñA Word from the Galleryò in *Araism Movement 5* by Sinmidele Ogunsanya that *Ara* is a Yoruba word meaning

ñwonderò and ñthunderò and associates it with *Ara* art as an acronym for aesthetically rich art. It agrees with critics who describe *Ara* art as authentic African technique with deep philosophy in African culture. It further describes *Ara* art as a process that involves painting different shades and tones with a palette knife on canvas that result in ña fragmented art work similar to a complex jigsaw puzzleò.³⁰ Conclusively, Onifade creatively and professionally uses his *Ara* art as shown above to ñentertain, amuse and touch peopleò.³¹

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CHAPTER SIX

MUFU ONIFADE'S *ARA* DISCIPLES

Conceived, hatched and nursed in the fulcrum of artistry by Mufu Onifade between 1989 and 1996 and launched into a movement in 2006, today, Araism has gained a wider acceptance within and outside Nigeria among the young painters. Onifade together with his *Ara* art disciples have made Araism a household name, evoking the imagery and dialectics of artistic excellence and new approach to painting. With Araism, the invention of one man has broken the long old age convention of painting with brushes and has awoken new wave of interest in past tradition, especially that of the Yoruba people. The young painters who give Araism that wide acceptance show equal verve and technical excellence thereby confronting the challenges inherent in many art movements with bold face. The first set of *Ara* art disciples who, together with the master launched the new art style in the Nigerian art scene, are waxing stronger.

The first sect of *Ara* art disciples participates constantly in Araism exhibitions. Each of them makes a mark with every exhibition, proving high standard of creative involvement in *Ara* art style. Chronologically, their works offer a panorama of artistic evolvement concerning individual style, maturity in articulating forms. *Onifade and some First Set of Ara Art Disciples* (Fig. 66) shows Onifade, the master/exponent/founder, at the center while surrounded by some disciples. Esther and Imafidor in this display are not members of the first set, but are here to identify with the it and the master. The aura of self-actualization, confidence and joy on the faces of these young painters can challenge any upcoming artist.



Fig. 66: Onifade and some first set of Ara Art Disciples, 2011.
© Mufu Onifade.

Those who are still joining Araism see it as a healthy challenge of artistic and professional excellence. Every new Araism exhibition reveals new entrants such as in the *Araism Group Photograph* (Fig. 67). The photograph portrays Araism members in Ara costume who exude excitement on their achievement. *Araism Group Photograph* shows Mufu Onifade, the Araism exponent, and some of his *Ara* art disciples who just completed the 10th Araism exhibition. The photograph portrays varied feelings: the exponent on white seems to say with aura of confidence, Araism, here we are! The

disciples on his right appear to join him in such characteristic confidence. Some on his left seem to say we did it again, while others are just amazed about their achievement, what they never thought could happen in life, what school curriculum could not offer them.



Fig. 67: Araism Group Photograph, 125 cm x 90 cm, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

With their stride in art experiences, it, therefore, becomes necessary to study the works of the Onifade's *Ara* disciples to determine their themes, styles, indigenous motifs, colour and influence of Araism movement. The first set of *Ara* disciples, including Oludotun Poopola, Akande Mautin Abiola, Jonathan Ikpoza, Awojobi Abolore and Oluwambe Amodu, features constantly in Araism yearly exhibitions. Membership of Araism, which is constantly increasing, includes some young artists such as Esther Emmanuel Fakunle, Jimoh Saliu Babatunde, George Egunjobi, Adeyeye Taiwo and Kesa

Babatunde. Others include Bolarinwa Olowo, Stephen Oni, Jonathan Imafidor, Abimbola Oladipupo, Temitope Olukotun, Odumbo Adeniran, Adegoke Akinola and many more. These and others reinvigorate Onifade's thinking. They are dealing with immediate relevant problems of the Nigerian socio-cultural society, searching the roots of the present incoherence. They seek an understanding to politics, economy and ideology, especially how they affect the communal and private life experiences. Their forms and colours are symbolically and idiomatically a reformation, condemning the present order and seeking a new one. They give daily experiences some touch that makes them pungent to the human psyche, generating some positive challenges. Their persistent search for fairness in a society with a very weak moral fiber is very significant. They draw inspiration from imageries of daily life and enact them to confront challenges and attempt to offer solution. The use of market, culture, politics and religion as metaphor to confront the widespread corruption in the country forms a key weapon that weaves the textures of many of the works together.

Disciple, Themes, Colour, Styles and Works

The study, which begins with Oludotun Popoola, one of the disciples, investigates some *Ara* disciples' individuality, themes, colour, styles and works.

Oludotun Popoola

An indigene of Abeokuta in Ogun State, but born in 1981 in Lagos, Oludotun Popoola obtained his primary school education in Zion African Church School in 1993. He attended State High School, Agege and completed his secondary school education in King's and Queen's College, Ibadan in 1999. After obtaining National Diploma in General Arts from the Federal Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State in 2004, he trained

informally at the Ara Studio in Lagos, acquired *Ara* art technique and became the founding member/Secretary of Araism Movement. He later proceeded to study BA Fine Arts degree in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife and graduated in 2008. He has featured in a number of exhibitions. In an interview, Oludotun Popoola describes himself as, ñIn me lies gold. I find the right channel (Araism) to mine it and that brings fulfillment to my spiritò.¹ From the studio, he has turned out a large number of works that speak volume for his position in Araism.



Oludotun Popoola, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Like his master, Popoola uses traditional woodcarving style and cultural themes in his *Ara* paintings. *Benin Chiefs* (Fig. 68) captures the theme of culture with an adopted

traditional woodcarving style. Compositionally, the painting shows five human figures who are engaged in Edo cultural dance. They are three males and two females. Only the female figures are fully dressed. The male figures though heavily beaded are not wearing any shirt except large wrappers with heavy loop at their loins. Some of the beads reinforce the circular movement dominant in the painting.

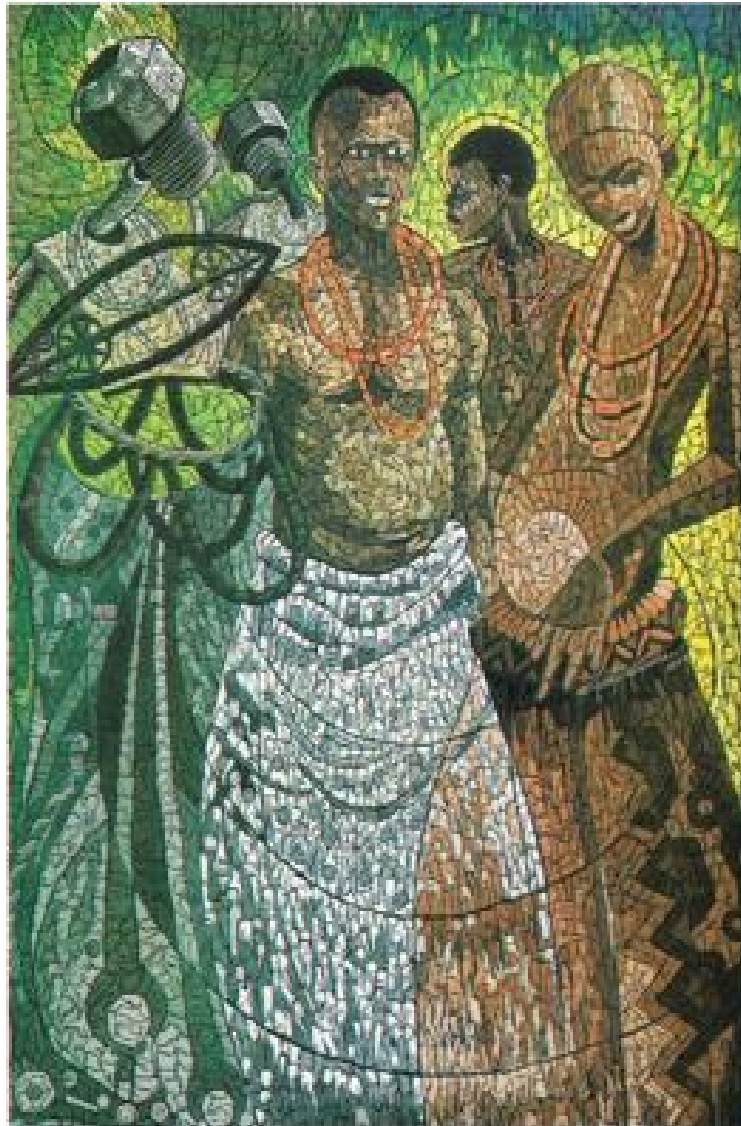


Fig. 68: *Benin Chiefs*, Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on Canvas, 80 cm × 57 cm, 2007.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Aesthetically, *Benin Chiefs* marries sculptural and painting stylistics, using *Ara* art technique. The painting also combines two types of sculptural style: spatial sculpture, using welded metal with car parts and volumetric sculpture, using carved wood and casting materials. The artist skillfully retains the sensory character of the sculptural materials in a combination of abstract, realistic and stylized sculpture. Maintaining the character of *Ara*, this painting finds no use of the principles of landscaping, yet it is able to achieve a sense of volumetric and aerial perspectives with the use of size and texture of figure and lighter background. The figures behind are less vivid.

Contextually, *Benin Chiefs* seeks to preserve and disseminate the cultural prestige of the Edo people. The artist uses dance as a cultural language, which is an expression of the people's beliefs and worldview. The motifs of the images are indigenous, which redefine the figure as traditional *Binis*, Edo people. The artist creates the male figures in bare torso except that they are heavily costumed with traditional beads and a flowing wrapper with a heavy sash at the loin. The female figures, though in spatial expression, reveal vividly the traditional attire of heavy headgear, a top and flowing wrapper with a heavy loop at the loin. The *Eben*, scepter of power, which the male figure wields, defines a chief, who with his entourage, is in a festive mood paying homage probably to the *Oba* (King). The motifs, facial expression and dramatic poses help to reinvigorate the theme of homage in traditional festival. The painting achieves harmony of colour and composition, unity and dominance that are characteristics of *Ara* art. This is in respect of appropriate choice of colour and its intensity, volumes of images, space, convexity and concavity of surfaces. It is factually and logically correct that the individual style here is a sculptural glorification of painting, *sculpto-painting*. This is like Onifade's *sculpto-*

painting style but the uniqueness of the combination of spatial and volumetric sculpture. Another influence on Oludotun Popoola by Onifade is the use of yellowish green, its placement and simplified composition. Influenced by his master, the paintings reveal further Oludotun Popoola's interest in carving, which help to define further his individual style.

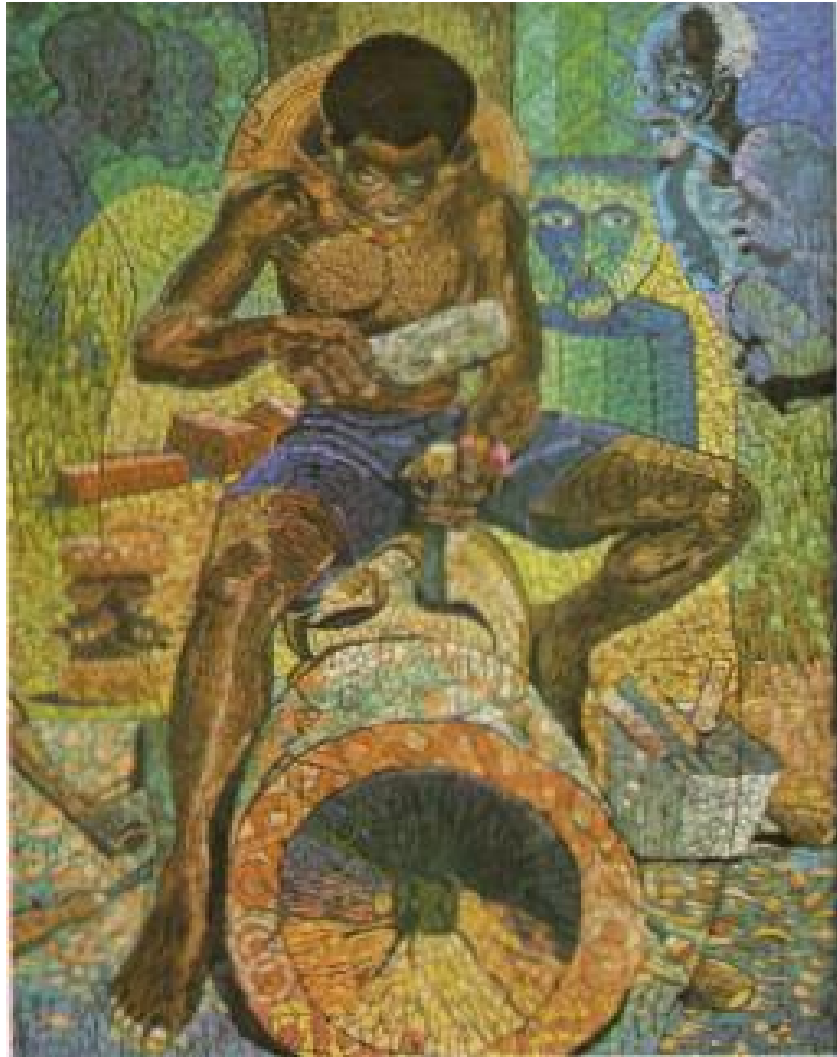


Fig. 69: *Gbedo-Gbedo*, Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 80 cm × 57 cm, 2007.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Pursuing traditional woodcarving style in painting, Popoola, in *Gbedo-Gbedo* (Fig. 69) captures a carver at work in the studio. He composes the painting using a naturalistic male figure and other figures in silhouette. The human figures in silhouette are behind the main figure. He applies the principles of indoor landscaping, separating the floor from the walls with an imaginary line. The artist supplies details by articulating tools and materials to define a wood carver's studio, which reemphasizes the action of woodcarving. Aesthetically, *Gbedo-Gbedo* uses the grain axis of the wood structure to supply lines that seem natural. The artist defines the lines very clearly: circles, straight and curves are perfect. Thematically, *Gbedo-Gbedo* portrays a traditional carver, his role and respect in the society. The carver applies his respected talent to work to the admiration of others. This is the true reflection of the artist and the society.

2007 was a year of exploration. The young painter was not satisfied with the woodcarving style. He wanted to prove that painting was a calling. Then he drops the style of woodcarving for painterly style. *Eru Mi Fuye*, Unburdened (Fig. 70) marks the change. It captures the burden of women. He composes this painting with a pregnant mother of many children who carried heavy load. All the figures are set in profile. Aesthetically, the painting is angular as a model of aerial perspective. It achieved depth with relation of volumes to distance.

Thematically, *Eru Mi Fuye* asks for birth control in a satirical manner. Satirically, the painting is able to communicate its message by using a pregnant mother over laboured yet smiling and getting on. Even the children are playful, but thematically, the message of family planning is very strong. His expressive forms include circles, colour harmony, intensity and unity to achieve success. His colour has also dropped from the

family of green to blue and off-white. The sense of the principles of landscaping is also dropped in this painting.



Fig. 70: *Eru Mi Fuye (Unburdened)*, Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 123 cm × 51 cm, 2007.
© Oludotun Popoola.

In the determination to communicate effectively, Oludotun Popoola uses familiar motifs and actions in *Ara* art. He does this effectively thereby keeping no one in doubt. *Echoes from the North* (Fig. 71) is one work among many that speaks volume. Compositionally, *Echoes from the North* is a figure painting of violists rendered

graphically with colours laid flat in different intensity and shades, using *Ara* technique. The violists vanish into very dark shade, which defines the violins further by giving them volume. The figureheads at the background give the illusion of crowded scenery and help to highlight the main figure. Among the figures, only two are emphasized.



Fig. 71: *Echoes from the North*, Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 123 cm × 51 cm, 2007.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Contextually, *Echoes from the North* lends support to the preservation of traditional institutions, using the motifs of traditional musicians. He places emphasis on costume and iconography to drive home his point. He highlights the costumes of the figures, which show occasional shades to define deep cleaves and folds. He employed

some iconographical symbols such as wall patterns at the background and violin common with Islamic religion of the northern part of Nigeria. The entire costumes help to communicate its message.

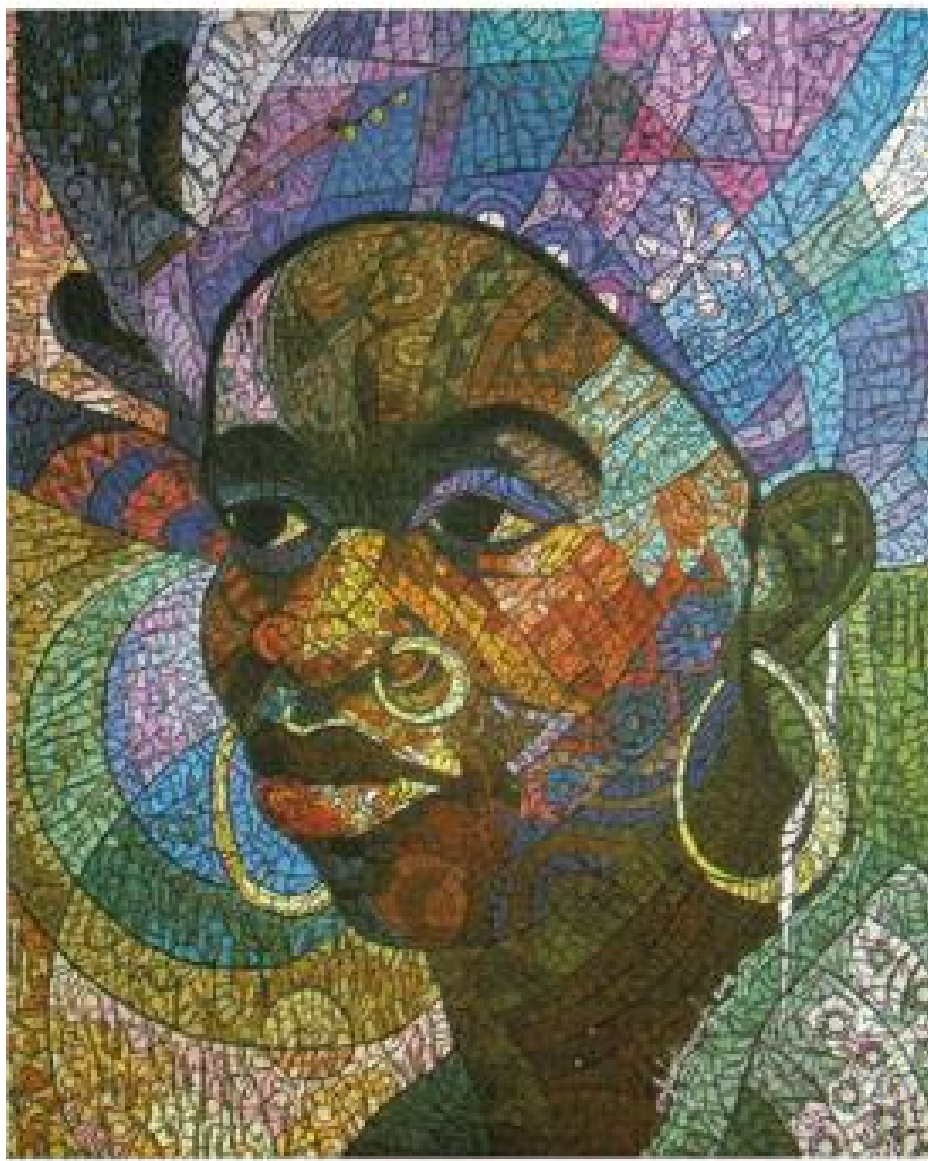


Fig. 72: *Arewa* (The Beauty Within), Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvass, 75 cm x 75 cm, 2008.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Like his master, Oludotun Popoola takes interest in the subject of beauty among the Yoruba people. He reveals a great skill in expressing correctness of anatomy, showing that he is a master of anatomy before branching off to formalist style of painting. *Arewa*, The Beauty Within (Fig. 72) captures a female bust that denotes beauty. The painting shows a female portrait with heavy headgear and ornaments. Aesthetically, he produces the figure realistically in profile, which is slightly tilted at the neck region, giving attention to colour value. He achieves unity between the image and the canvas with colour harmony by. In spite of the devotion to colour, Popoola's skill of expressing accurate anatomy in this painting is very high. The painting retains the artist's style of circles and lighter colour on the canvas, which help to emphasize the focal point.

Staying with his usual style of circle-shape pattern, Popoola weaves round the canvas, using lines and colour intensity and hues to make a resounding statement. Thematically, *Arewa* depicts true beauty among the Yoruba people. He philosophically embodies physical and attitudinal beauty in a woman for a better society in this painting. Oludotun Popoola envisions *Arewa* as a virtuous and physically beautiful woman, believing that virtue is the true beauty.

Many religions portray man as a sojourner on earth. Supporting this, humanity believes that the world is a stage and man is an actor. Oludotun Popoola's *Ara* art gives vent to the above belief. Some of his *Ara* art works such as *Aajo Laye*, The Return (Fig. 73) share from this belief to capture the symbolic walk of life. The painting uses some female figures who take a walk while carrying load in back axial movement. Aesthetically, the images are in realism. The images form an overall conical structure bonded with spiral lines that end up in aerial perspective, which is reemphasized by

distant houses at the background. It combines hues of yellow and green to achieve unity between images and canvas. The great skill of anatomy in this painting is astonishing. Contextually, Popoola uses *Aajo Laye* to philosophical teach moral, establishing the fact that man is a sojourner on earth and that his home is in the great beyond. He admits that the journey is far by positioning the houses very far away from the images who are engaged in vigorous walk as if they were returning from evening market.

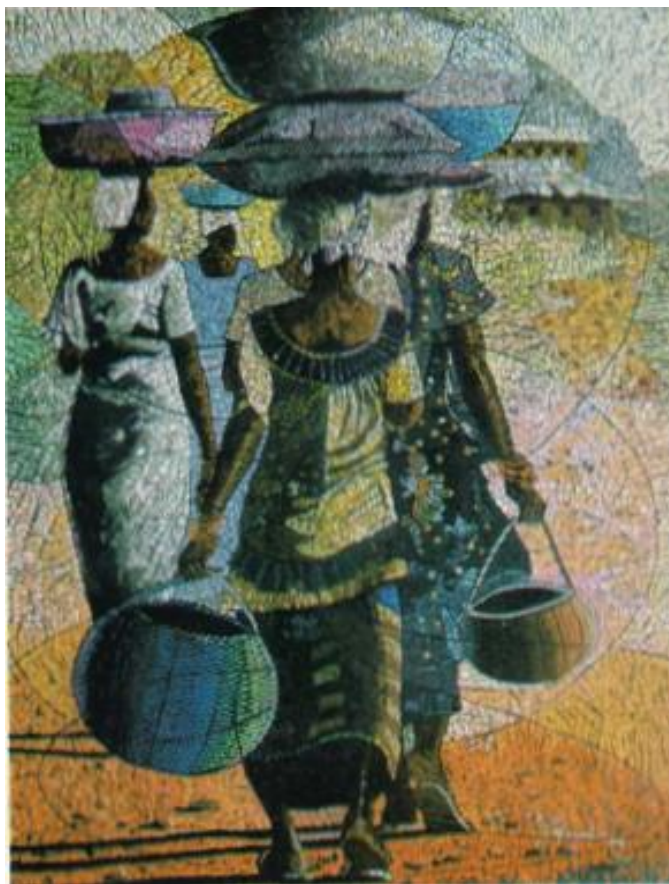


Fig. 73: *Aajo Laye* (The Return), Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 20 cm × 90 cm, 2008.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Today, environmental hazards are a topical subject of discussion. Different fields of learning, including visual arts have shown concern about the physical environment.

Popoola's *Ara* art documents the theme of physical environmental protection, using *Igara* (Fig. 74). Compositionally, this work is an outdoor painting with an eroded landscape of houses and vegetation. The painting portrays a splash of woven colours behind the houses in an overall enclosure of dominant purple-brown. Aesthetically, *Igara* achieves perspective with variations of light and shade at the centre. *Ara* technique is mastered here so much so that the crackles and forms in the painting form unity, rhythm and harmony, giving the illusion of colour splash.



Fig. 74: *Igara*, Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 60 cm × 40 cm, 2009.
© Oludotun Popoola.

The artist has a style of enclosing a painting so that the action will take place at the centre. Popoola's weaving style is very clear in *Igara*. He introduces two styles of weaving to this painting. One entails the use of thick lines to weave on the wall at the background. The other uses thin lines in circles. Thematically, *Igara* reacts to erosion as

it has affected the physical environment, using traditional architecture in a semi-urban area, Igara, a neighbouring town of Auchi where he acquired polytechnic education. He uses dilapidated houses to reflect a physical environment devastated by erosion in a community where the inhabitants experience scarcity of water.



Fig. 75: *Iya Alata* (Pepper Seller), Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 76 cm, 2010.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Popoola's interest in the environment is very revealing in little things that happen around him. His *Ara* art, using *Iya Alata*, Pepper Seller (Fig. 75) exemplifies this in a female figure selling fish in realism. The painting aesthetically reveals an open umbrella and a wide traditionally woven tray to enclose the image at the centre, giving an overall conical structure. He deploys the entire painting in circular lines. He cleverly extends the

circular nature of the open umbrella with lines in order to continue to make full circles. The baskets are woven. The pepper, tomatoes, onions and their containers also form circles. Thematically, *Iya Alata* conveys commercial activity, querying the poor economy of the country. There was the commodity to sell but there was none to buy because the people had no money. The rate of poverty is high. The seller, tired of expectation, had her eyes produced very large and pulping to connote expectation that has no end, no one was there to buy.



Fig. 76: *Amuludun* (The Entertainer), Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 41 cm, 2010.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Though many of Popoola's *Ara* works show serious themes of great concern, some are humorous. Artistically, he represents the two extremes very skillfully as *Amuludun*, The Entertainer (Fig. 76), where he projects entertainment in society, speaks volume. Compositionally, he produces a human figure drumming in front of other musicians. He aesthetically emphasizes the particular drummer, using two ground levels to depict two groups of entertainers whom he weaves together with spiral lines. The purple on the drapery contrasts the reddish foreground and the yellowish green background. He represents the looming figure in front in a profile with the neck tilted to put the head in frontal axis. Other images behind share both profile and frontal planes of reference. He creates depth with the illusion of distance and lighter colour. Contextually, *Amuludun* depicts culture, using traditional musical motifs and a matching action. Music is part of humanity.

Popoola attempts to be total in covering a wide range of subjects. He brings into *Ara* art agricultural themes as *Oko Baba Dotun* (Fig. 77) exemplifies. The painting depicts the theme of traditional farming in the rural area. He composes this painting with human figures seating in front of a farmhouse, trees and tires. Aesthetically, he creates depth in this painting with the illusion of distance and lighter colour, emphasizing vegetation. The colours agree with the colours of natural vegetation, showing slight difference occasioned by weather. The painting, which is boxed up, is hazy. The box shows definite a warp effect. Thematically, *Oko Baba Dotun* depicts traditional farming as a source of livelihood. In a country where traditional farming is largely the occupation of the people art cannot ignore it but promote it and call for government attention to revamping it. Seeking government attention becomes imperative especially that the

Nigerian government has shifted attention from farming to the oil sector. It is no gain saying that the oil sector alone cannot support the country. The oil sector, as defined by the West, tilted towards supremacy in the measurement of economic standards and successes. Though the living standard of the nation largely depends on the oil sector, yet the approach to it is fast eroding the agrarian economy that once held the people together. A nation without a stable agrarian economy is comparable to a hen on an unstable string; it must dance to the rhythm of its unstable base.

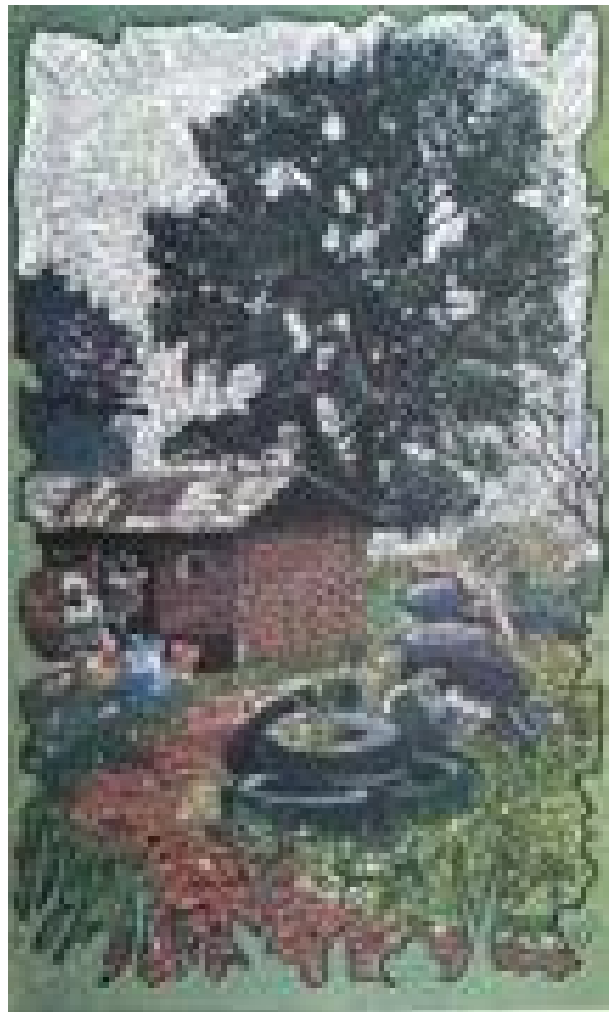


Fig. 77: *Oko Baba Dotun*, Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 41 cm, 2011.
© Oludotun Popoola.

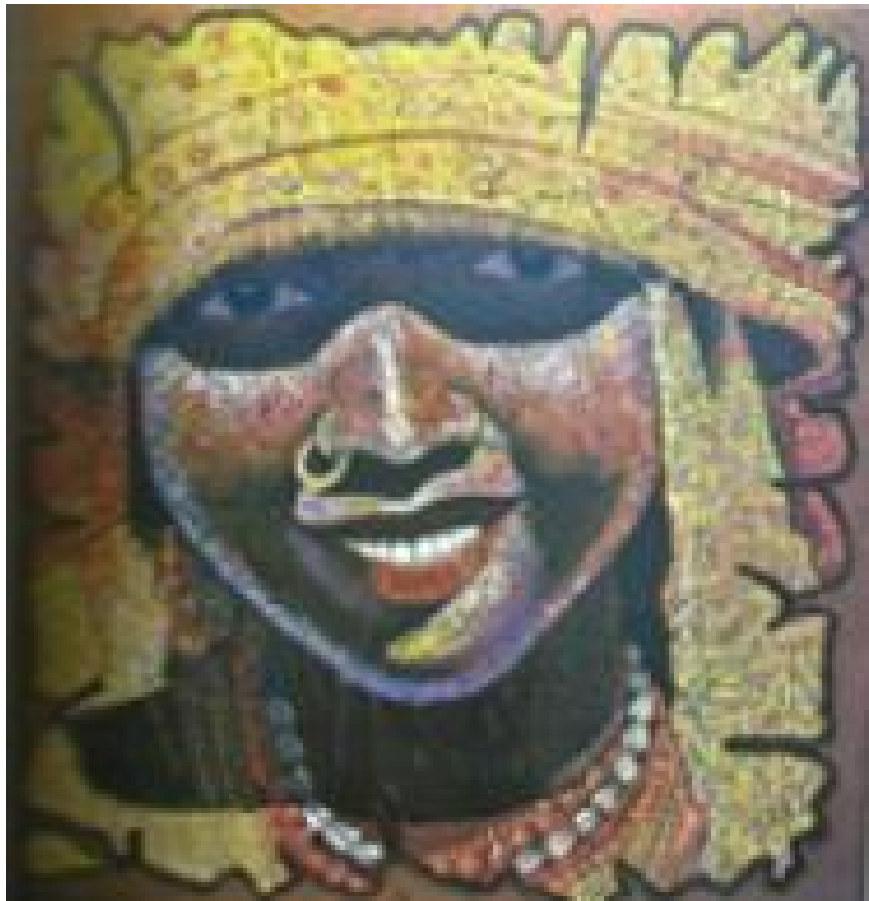


Fig. 78: *Oju Loge* (Beauty Definitive), Oludotun Popoola, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 41 cm, 2011.
© Oludotun Popoola.

The artist uses *Ara* art to project virtue. He deploys female image as model of virtue. *Oju Loge*, Beauty Definitive (Fig. 78) captures the virtuous woman by creating a physically beautiful woman in naturalism. The female portrait is flamboyantly draped and is emplaced in a frontal plane of reference. He uses yellow ochre on the drapery to blend harmoniously with light purple background, which further forms a bond between the image and the canvas. The minor forms on the face transit smoothly but they cast deep shadows on the underlying structure. Although, the figure is realistic the heavy headgear is mechanical with the folds arranged to alter its natural flow. Contextually, *Oju Loge* philosophically embodies physical and attitudinal beauty, reechoing *Arewa* as a virtuous

and physically beautiful woman. He contends that women make more meaning in a society with their culturally approved character. He believes that a physically beautiful woman who lacks virtue would end up a reject. Indeed, the beauty of a wife to her husband and family is in her character.



Fig. 79: *Kokoro To Njefo* (Systemic Destruction), Oludotun Popoola, mixed media, 99 cm × 77 cm, 2012.
© Oludotun Popoola.

Art comments on society subtly or aggressively, using motifs and themes that are symbolical and iconographical or spiritual. Popoola's art makes statements on society symbolically. Many of his paintings such as *Kokoro To Njefo*, *Systemic Destruction* (Fig. 79) symbolically make a serious statement on the systematic destruction of the economy of the country. The painting is vegetal with a perching ant as a parasite. Aesthetically, *Kokoro To Njefo* is naturalistic except that it also shares form some mechanical elements. The leaves are natural but their pose makes them mechanical, as they stand straight without yielding to environmental pressure. The climbing insect is realistic. The yellowish green is naturally in place. Thematically, Popoola, in *Kokoro To Njefo*, philosophically condemns systemic destruction of the fabrics that hold society together. He observes that much of the problem of the country has human face and traces it to corruption, which bites deeply into the economy. This painting, like most of Popoola's paintings, thrives on thematic relevance.

From the works of art above, Oludotun Popoola's individual style in Araism meanders between the use of woodcarving expression in painting and a linear web in an overall Araism. With maturity, he drops woodcarving style for web style in a serious colourization, using thin lines in complete and broken circles to weave his paintings together. This is clear in his serious works such as *Benin Chiefs*, *Gbedo-Gbedo* (woodcarving style), *Erum Mi Fuye*, *Arewa*, *Aajo Laye*, *Igara*, *Iya Alata* and *Amuludun*. His themes are pungent and topical, meandering between culture and economy. The artist's commitment to his people is not in doubt. He constantly reminds his people of the world beyond and that they are sojourners in the present one, but must return one day. This reminder carries with it the weight of purity; man must live above this mundane

world. He employs the market metaphor to appeal to reason. He deploys actions and imageries to attain grandeur in painting. Like his master, he is committed to using visual art as a veritable tool to ensuring societal change. His crusade for a new social order is very tact. Apart from his master's colour influence on him, he is a formalist, like his master, employing motifs, images and colour as communicative tools.

Abiola M. Akande



Abiola M. Akande, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Another of Onifade's *Ara* disciple is Abiola Mautin Akande (Oldskool) who was born on September 6, 1978. He is an indigene of Badagry, Lagos State. He studied BA

Fine Arts in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. He studied *Ara* art informally under Mufu Onifade and became a founding member of Araism Movement. Akande was a member of the 30th Coronation Anniversary Committee of His Royal Majesty, De Wheno Aholu Menu Toyi 1, OFR, LL.D JP (The Akran of Badagry Kingdom). The artist is the Art/Creative Director of Sewhude Concepts, publisher of CityMood Magazine and CEO of September Studios and Art Gallery. The painter is the president of Society of Badagry Artists (SBA). Akande has participated in a number of art exhibitions. He has extended the painting of *Ara* art on paper and canvas to printing on fabric. He calls this style African fabric and in one word, *wooden*. In an interview, Akande reveals, ñArt (*Ara* art) is an investment, entertainment, guarantoré ò He, therefore, enjoins people to ñget one (buy African fabric/*Ara* art) into their houses and that they shall testify...ò ² From the studio, he has turned out a large number of works that speaks volume for his place in Araism.

Like his master, Abiola Mautin Akande is an iconographic painter with themes that vary from history through culture to secular. *5 O'clock* (Fig. 80) portrays African sense of time. Painting in realism uses a mat-like canvas of linear effect. The background has straps of hues, tone and value, which Akande harmonizes with repetition on the costume. The painting is finally produced on a linear patterned canvas (Printed African Fabric called *wooden*), which gives the whole painting linear-patterned style with boxing effect. Aesthetically, he combined table clocks and a cock, marrying African and Western sense of time. The two table clocks and the cock show the effect of acculturation. The painting largely uses linear effect, clock and cock as motifs of time on printed African fabric called *wooden*. Contextually, *5 O'clock* depicts African lateness to work and other

engagements generally known as ñAfrican Timeò and recommends 5 am as an ideal time to begin the day's work to avoid lateness. He believes that ñAfrican Timeò has not done the country any good and that it has become a source of worry.



Fig. 80: *5 O'clock*, Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 75 cm × 60 cm, 2007.
© Abiola M. Akande.

In a decaying society, the artist who has a role of a watchdog reflects it in his work. The artist knows that passivity might become a betrayer of the people and lack of integrity, therefore, he must speak loud and clear. If the artist is not ready to break faith with his function, his works must reflect the changing society. Akande's works of art show his faith and functions in his determination for a holistic correctness of attitude in the face of decadence. *Akiyesi*, *Observation* (Fig. 81) addresses decadence, using a

stylized human figure with his talking drum. The one figure composition uses aesthetically a mat-like canvas of linear effect. The background is in straps of hues and value, which the artist harmonizes with repetition on the costume. He maintains in this painting his linear patterned canvas (Printed African Fabric called *wooden*) with boxing effect. Thematically, Akande, in his *Akiyesi* philosophically reminds people of the injunction, "Look before you leap", using the motif of a traditional drummer who must study his audience to achieve successful performance. He enjoins people to observe instead of watching events in order to learn and have a positive change of attitude. He condemns hurrying to do things without reason.



Fig. 81: *Akiyesi* (Observation), Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 106 cm × 60 cm, 2007.
© Abiola M. Akande.

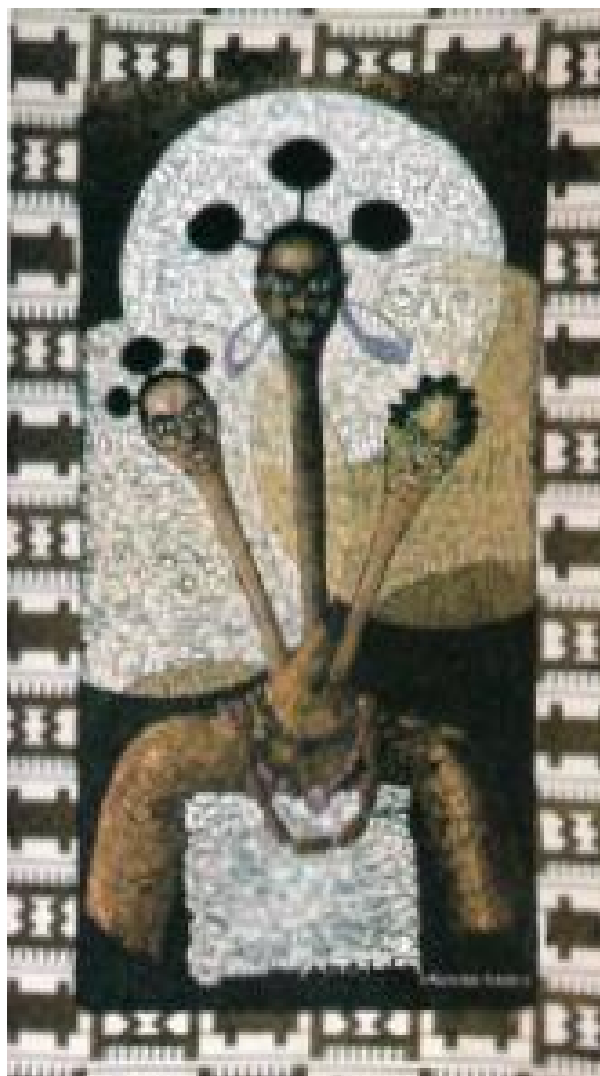


Fig. 82: *Igba-Meta* (Three Phases), Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 106 cm × 60 cm, 2007.
© Abiola M. Akande.

Giving moral lessons, Akande satirically characterizes the female folk, using his *Ara* art style. He believes that women assist men spiritually and physically, agreeing with the Christian faith in this respect. The artist always argues that the female sex has three phases in life. *Igba-Meta*, Three Phases (Fig. 82), dissects the female folk in line with his argument. The painting is produced in abstraction. The female figure has three heads, draped in wrapper across the chest and a number of beads hanging from the neck.

The canvas is in circles of hues, tones and lines. Aesthetically, Akande retains the style of linear-patterned boxing effect with an addition of large circles of colour value as background. Contextually, *Igba-Meta* shows the three stages in a woman's life. Each head represents philosophically a stage in life: childhood, adulthood and old age with their specific demand. It reveals that in childhood, the girl blossoms, looks at the world as a free place and builds new castles in the air. As an adult, she begins to face the challenges of life; new castles give way to reality. At old age, she looks at life as vanity, believing that the just shall have his reward hereafter and strives to be the moral bridge between the old and the new generations. The reality of these stages seems to apply to many people.

Many artists show a command of language. Sometimes they deploy the ordinary usage and at other times its poetic usage. Many employ the symbolism and idiomatic dialectics of language in their works. *1845* (Fig. 83) is laced with the ductility of language, using the symbols of the tortoise and dog to reflect the colonial era in Badagry, Nigeria. Labeling the painting 1845, he composes it altruistically with the motifs a turtle climbing a rope towards another world where dogs watch over food items. Aesthetically, the painting characteristically retains the linear-patterned boxing effect with straps of hues and value, which contrasted the colours of the foreground and the entire canvas. Thematically, 1845 is a flashback on the colonial masters who are symbolized as the turtle coming from its land of hunger to Nigeria full of natural resources. Indeed, the main reason for exploration and partitioning of Africa by Europeans was economy. The watching dog represents Nigerian nationalists who watchfully agitate for independence.

When independence was finally attained the colonial masters like the turtle on the broken rope fell and had his hope shattered like the skin of the turtle.



Fig. 83: *1845*, Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2007.
© Abiola M. Akande.

The undaunted symbolist of our time continues exploration into the colonial era. Badagry is historically his focus. *Iya Takun Wale*, From Hiding (Fig. 84) and *1845 III* (Fig. 85) are respectively historical and symbolic of colonial rule. Though they double as landscape and architectural paintings, they are indeed iconic, documenting events and

time. Aesthetically, they capture the design, vegetation and the sky while paying attention to the appropriate hues and values of the building. The artist characteristically boxes the paintings with linear pattern effect. Contextually, *Iya Takun Wale* and *1845 III* reflect on the colonial government in Nigeria. He uses the paintings to document an era in Nigerian history. The works capture the first storey house built in Badagry by Christian missionaries in the heart of colonialism in 1845.



Fig. 84: *Iya Takun Wale* (From Hiding), Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 105 cm × 75 cm, 2010.
© Abiola M. Akande.

Though *Iya Takun Wale*, from hiding, (Fig. 84) and *1845 III* (Fig. 85) are very similar structurally and thematically, they are not exactly the same, especially in their aesthetic appeal such as articulation of their hues, composition and colour values. The shade of blue in *Iya Takun Wale* is deeper than it is in *1845 III*, which also varies as

bluish purple. The shade of brown is also deeper in *Iya Takun Wale* than it is in *1845 III*. Compositionally, *Iya Takun Wale* is almost in complete frontal plane of reference with brighter hue of white while the other is in profile with off-white. The texture of *Iya Takun Wale* is subdued but the other is rough. The building of *Iya Takun Wale* appears to float on a deep brown foreground. However, the building of *1845 III* is well seated on a foreground of bright hue of red. Finally, while *Iya Takun Wale* concentrates on the use of zigzag lines and dots to make the boarder *1845 III* combines straight, broken, zigzag lines and dots of varying degrees.



Fig. 85: *1845 III*, Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2008.
© Abiola M. Akande.

Akande is also satirical. He uses *Iya Takun Wale* (Fig. 86) to satirize a segment of the society that believes that, because they win, they, therefore, know it all. The artist composes the painting with the animal world, using the tortoise as a model of

intelligence. In times of hunger, it intends to go to another world where there is food. The tortoise climbs with difficulty when it can just walk under freely. At last, it fell and got itself broken and its skin patched. The elephant wears a crown while the pig is just indifferent.



Fig. 86: *Iya Takun Wale*, Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 46 cm, 2009.
© Abiola M. Akande.

That Akande's style of boxing is no longer in doubt. His works have established this style, which he combines with subjects of historical and legendary implications. *Sato* (Fig. 87) and many others underscore the style stated above. The painting is divided

pictorially by the drum into two equal parts with each part taking half of the drum and a human figure. The figures in silhouette are engaged in drumming. The painting is boxed with a wide strap of white and finally it is wrapped up in a linear patterned band. Contextually, *Sato* is legendary. The drum is a spirit medium through which the ancestors speak to the living. The implications of the drum in the Yoruba cultural area make it integral. *Sato* is a traditional royal drum in Badagry, reputed as the largest drum in the country. Specially trained individuals play the twin drum (male and female) on special occasions to usher in peace and prosperity.



Fig. 87: *Sato*, Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2008.
© Abiola M. Akande.

The artist also takes interest in his environment. Among his works that reflect this subject matter is the *Gone for Fishing* (Fig. 88), which further captures seascape and the economy of the riverine people. Compositionally, he produces a riverine architectural painting with houses suspended on props. The houses have open doors and floors decked on top of water. The boxing with linear pattern effect here has a slight variation, using undefined zigzag pattern. This painting is aesthetically a seascape, which sacrifices the rules of scape for the theme and value of colour. It has no skyline, no form of vegetation and perspective. Since it does not suggest any form of depth, it is, therefore, flat. Thematically, *Gone for Fishing* captures human ecology, entrapping man's fishing activities. It encourages farmers to work to support the Nigerian populace.



Fig. 88: *Gone for Fishing*, Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 75 cm × 40 cm, 2008.
© Abiola M. Akande.

The artist is very philosophical. This is remarkable in his works, especially *Arabolade* (Fig. 89) which captures a phase in Akande's life. Very abstracted, *Arabolade* is composed with a large caterpillar, cowries and intricate linear design. The painting is aesthetically divided into two sections, sharing the caterpillar into two. The painting is dominantly yellowish green and off-white. It does not suggest any form of depth; it is flat. The motifs other than the caterpillar appear to fly in space. Contextually, *Arabolade* acknowledges the honour that associates with Araism movement. The artist actually names his first son *Arabolade*, literally interpreted as *Araism honour*. Akande crafted this message in a painting that depends largely on communicative power and application of colour for success.

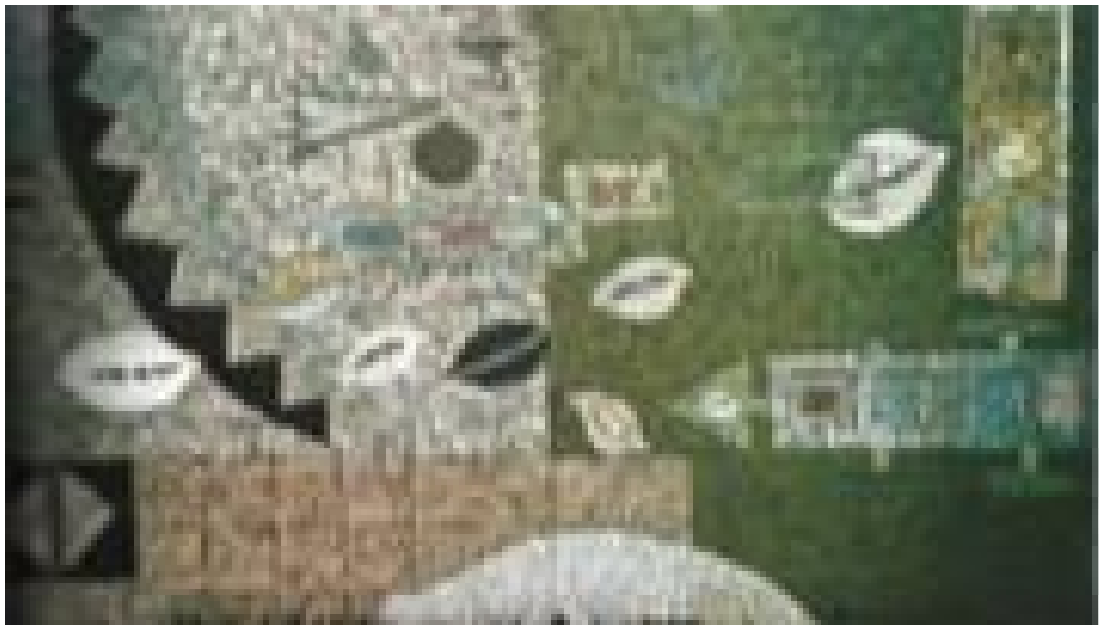


Fig. 89: *Arabolade*, Abiola M. Akande; acrylic on canvas, 102 cm × 61 cm, 2011.
© Abiola M. Akande.

The artist's works are remarkably historical with the deployment of the dialectics of colonial history in Nigeria. Literature and history books have focused greatly on

colonialism in Nigerian history. Even the press does the same thing. The visual art is not left out of the linguistic of colonial history in Africa. Many visual artists, including Abiola Akande have also focused on colonialism with the motifs of slavery. Some of his works such as *1767* (Fig. 90) is reminiscence of colonialism, using the model of a chained human figure as imagery of slavery.



Fig. 90: *1767*, Abiola M. Akande; acrylic on canvas, 127 cm × 71 cm, 2011.
© Abiola M. Akande.

The painting is compositionally a human head in a chain, a silhouette of human figures and a large ship in the sea. Technically, the painting has a problem of plane of reference, making the position of the observer doubtful. The large face is in frontal plane. If the observer stands in front of this face, he cannot see the little figures in silhouette increasing in height as they extend from him. If the observer stands by the bigger figure in silhouette, he also cannot see the large face frontally. Thematically, *1767* portrays slavery in Nigeria about 1767. It informs and reminds humanity of abolition of slave trade, which took place at different times in different countries. America Revolution freed

some slaves between 1775 and 1785. Britain abolished slavery in 1833. Abolition of slave trade led to founding Freetown Colony and, therefore, independence in 1787.³

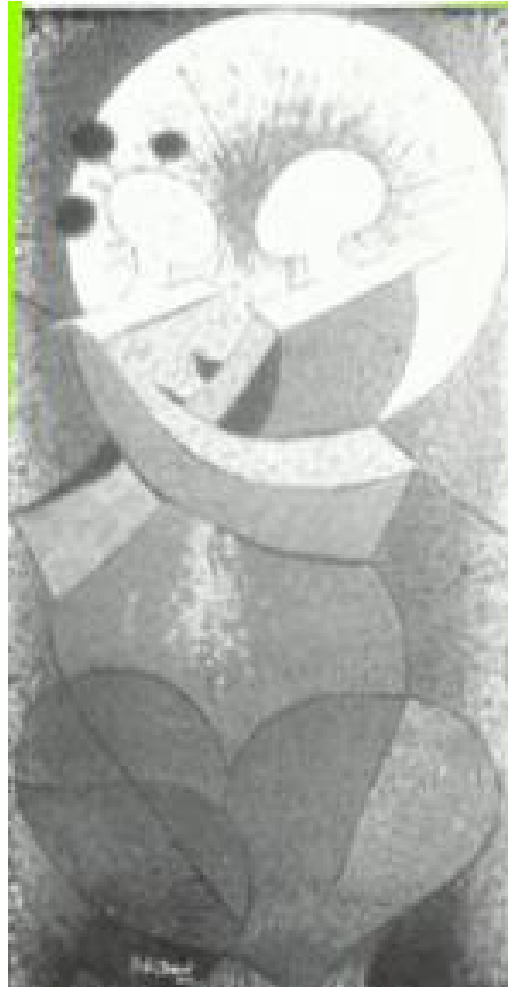


Fig. 91: *Eju Ewuro* (Morning Due), Abiola M. Akande, acrylic on canvas, 120 cm × 52 cm, 2006.
© Abiola M. Akande.

Man is innately romantic. The artist who is a social student and who is equally romantic observes society and uses his art to document and comment on it, condemning or praising as his judgment leads him. In keeping faith with the society, Akande uses *Eju Ewuro*, Morning Due (Fig. 91) as a divine model of romance. The artist composes the work with two human figures in a romantic entanglement, standing face to face. The

artist aesthetically creates the male and female figures in a cubic form as sculptural style of expression. The heads are spherical and stand on barrel-like necks, which rest on square shoulders cast in a circle of highlight.

In the painting, deep shade of hues that splash, outwards further highlight the heads. The arms in clear planes, seem to grow from the sides of the cubic busts in convex and concave forms to grip each other to reveal their affection. The arms lie on each other to create a sharp intersection and deep undercut. The artist clearly defines the female figure with her plaited hair in three loops, breasts that grow from the chest to penetrate into the male figure and heavier hips. The contrived waists of the two figures rise smoothly to a pick that is beyond the bust line. The two hips finally fuse together to form one person; the two shall become one and they become one. The legs finally vanish into circular lines.

Contextually, *Eju Ewuro* highlights some aspects of university campus activity, using a boy and a girl in romantic mold. The artist captures the popular ñOctober Rushò among students in university campus when universities had calendar. Implicitly, the artist condemns government non-commitment to tertiary education, which has caused rot and slashed some fun in the higher institutions. With this non-commitment, the artist seems to argue that there is little or no fun in the higher institutions any more. He also appears to call government to order.

From the above works, Abiola M. Akande's individual style in Araism is linear-patterning boarder on *wooden* (fabric canvas) with purple and yellowish green as dominant colours, exploring different characteristics of expressive lines. He is influenced thematically by his master as a cultural advocate for the preservation of traditional

institutions by exploring folklores and traditional history. His serious works clearly show this style, themes and colours. Characteristically, he has penchant for communicative motifs rather than anatomical expression though his few works reveal a great skill. Therefore, he is an expressivist unlike his master who is a formalist but greatly influenced in the parlance of cultural themes and colour application.

Jonathan Ikpoza



Jonathan Ikpoza, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Jonathan Ikpoza is also one of the first five followers of Araism. He was born in Ikorodu on December 1, 1979. However, he is an indigene of Agbor in Delta State. He is a pioneer member of Araism Movement. He studied National Diploma, General Arts, Federal Polytechnic, Auchi. He won the overall Best Student Price of the school while

graduating with distinction in 2006. He has also obtained Higher National Diploma in Painting in the same institution in 2009. He is a pioneering member of Araism Movement. He is the founder of the Creative Minds and Art Manager/CEO, Junix Studio, Lagos.

Some of his group exhibitions include Rebirth of Womanhood, Benin (2005), De Emergence, Auchi (2005), Itokpoese, Lagos (2005) and Within Our Grasps, Lagos (2006). Others are Araism Movement, Lagos (2006), Aesthetic Bond, Lagos (2006), Beautiful Nigeria, Lagos (2007), Expression Again (Kambani), Kano, Abuja and Calabar (2007). Also, others are Olokun Festival, Badagry (2007), Aesthetic Bond 2, Lagos (2007), Araism Movement 2, Lagos (2007), Araism Movement 3, Lagos (2008), Aesthetic Bond 3, Lagos (2008), Artists Convention, Auchi (2009), PACA (Pan African Circle of Artists) Exhibition and Alliance Francaise (2009). His awards include Overall Best Student Prize graduating with Distinction - ND (2006), Overall Best Student Prize graduating with Distinction - HND (2009), Rector's Award (2009). In an interview, Jonathan Ikpoza reveals, "My colours revolve around my canvas in imitation of the planet. Wine makes the heart rejoice. So is my (*Ara*) art."⁴

Jonathan Ikpoza's individual style in Araism is conical composition, using yellow, purple and brown as dominant colours to express secular themes on dignity of labour, moral, unity and communal living. He arranges his objects in a dome-like structure with the middle object at the pick and others descend at the wings to a level base. He explores expressive lines, using circles, straps of spiral and straight lines in *Ara* technique. The master's influence on him is very noticeable on colour scheme. However, his works persist on realism, paying attention to anatomical correctness. Even when he

distorts forms, the distortion shows only in transition. Therefore, Ikpoza is a realist painter unlike his master who is a formalist. Their interests intersect in *Ara* technique, secular themes and colour scheme.

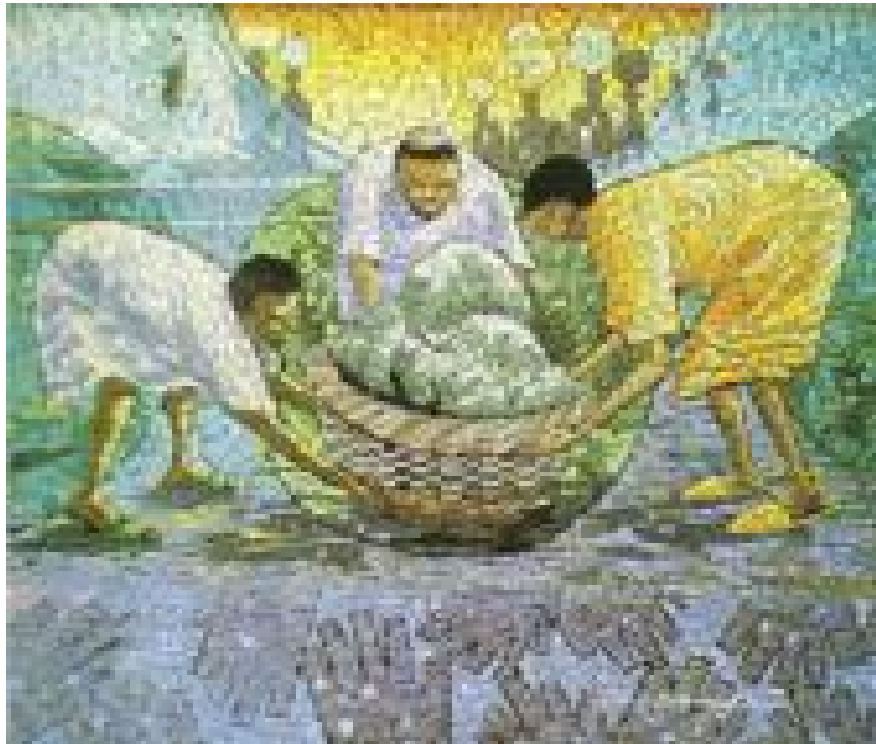


Fig. 92: *Agbajo Owo* (Unity of Purpose), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 84 cm, 2007.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Ikpoza's assertion above runs clearly in his works with pungent messages, which have serious implications on society. *Agbajo Owo*, Unity of Purpose (Fig. 92) captures teamwork as a determinant of success in society. He composes the painting with three figures that bend to carry a big load in a basket. The painting has three large circles bordering the three figures. Two are green while the other one, which is at the top centre background, is yellow. Silhouette of small human figures surround the yellow circle at the base. Aesthetically, the artist produces *Agbajo Owo* with the human figures and load

in half circles, leaving them for the observer to complete imaginarily by extension. He creates the foreground with flat hands that at a point intersect and at the other interpenetrate one another. The background is in silhouettes of human figures all in different axial movement.



Fig. 93: *Ayo*, Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 107 cm × 59 cm, 2007.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

The artist is very critical about his society from which his works seem to pick every thing. While he cherishes teamwork, he also agitates for communal living, reechoing the saying that ñall work without play makes Jack a dull boyò. *Ayo* (Fig. 93) depicts communal living. He composes this painting with six human figures, houses and vegetation. Two figures are playing draft while three are watching. Aesthetically, he directs attention to the centre where the human figures are engaged in a game with spiral straps that tend to move from the centre. An intersecting line separates land from space with the use of the vegetation. Depth is further created with the small objects at the base of the vegetation. With this painting, Ikpoza achieves unity, rhythm and harmony with

the green foliage at the left hand background that is complemented with the green houses at the right hand centre, green drapery at the centre and the greenish foreground. Contextually, *Ayo* philosophically crusades for communal living thereby supporting life in the rural areas. Traditional setting in African villages is built on communality among the people. Traditional institutions enact the unity of the people. Things are done in common. Everyone is his brother's keeper. Family eats from the same plate. Farming is jointly done. The people gather at the square in the evenings to share daily experiences. An act of injustice to one is to all. This painting is more successful than *Agbajo Owo* in terms of technicalities.

An artist hardly separates himself from his environment. Ikpoza is an indigene of Delta State where local fishing is a source of living to some people. The local fish farmers make their own wicker-fish-traps or buy from crafts experts. The craft is both economic and art. This caught the painter's attention in his art. *Ukuerin*, Fishing Trap (Fig. 94) reflects craft as a source of economy and art. Compositionally, the painting is figural; using a female figure weaving a fish trap in a sitting position. The artist interlaces the background and dress of the figure with outlines of fish. Aesthetically, *Ukuerin* is naturalistic which pays serious attention to correctness of anatomy. It uses interplay of colour straps and dominant areas of light and shade to achieve principles and elements of art. At the right side of the painting where interplay of straps and the figure dominate, it uses a thin line to define the outline of the figure. Contextually, *Ukuerin* depicts a source of economy common in the riverine areas. The painting doubles as a means of livelihood and as an artist at work, making craft. The painting deploys harmony of colours, thematic relevance against execution, rhythmic flow and compositional compactness.

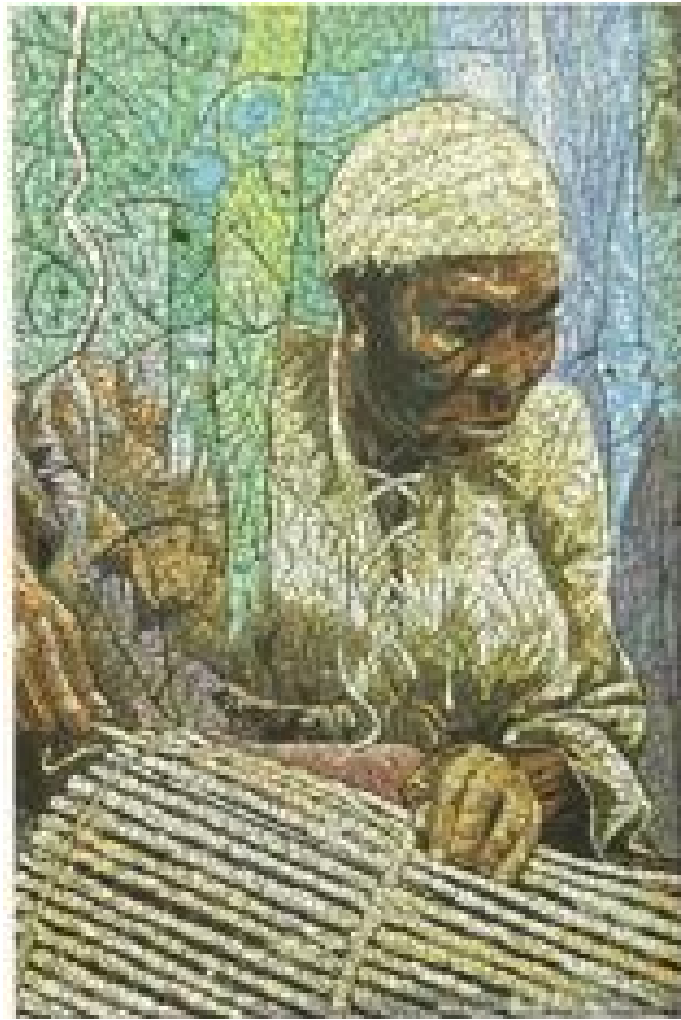


Fig. 94, *Ukuerin* (Fishing Trap), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 62 cm, 2007.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

The artist is a critical being who uses his works to mirror the changing society, including the government of his country. He comments on governance with which he finds fault. He believes that governance in the country has some pitfalls, which make followership difficult. To comment on the pitfalls of governance, he turns satirical as some of his works reveal. *Ketekete*, Horse Rider (Fig. 95) satirizes leadership, deploying the model of a horse rider. The artist compositionally creates the figural painting, using figures of two boys, one riding on the other like a horse and its rider. The rider urges the

symbolic horse on with a band that gags it. The artist aesthetically gives attention to correct rendition of anatomy in a vegetative canvas, marrying the colours of both figures and canvas in harmonious dexterity. The drapery of the figures defines them further as children, the rider younger than the horse.



Fig. 95: *Ketekete* (Horse Rider), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 70 cm × 70 cm, 2008.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Contextually, *Ketekete* portrays leadership and followership. Symbolically, it produces the human horse and the rider who are in character with such focus that suggests that only concentration would do and that it encourages man to do just that.

However, that the horse is gagged and the rider is younger suggest some challenges. The leader, the rider, who may be inexperienced with age, directs the horse, which is symbolic of government. Then since government has not direction except with the leader, the leader determines the quality of governance, which *Ketekete* believes that is very low. It, therefore, attempts to offer a solution by suggesting a good mindset, using models of good character. Artistically, the painting correctly communicates with harmony, rhythm and theme in relation to technical execution.

In a loose society, discipline is a great need. When decadence defines a society, a generational reform is compulsory. Many artists, therefore, engage art as a corrective measure. In this context, Ikpoza uses his *Ara* paintings to address indiscipline and inculcate discipline in children. He is an ardent believer of the admonition, ñCharity begins at homeò. His art does not only depict the theme, but also has it as legend. *Ilela Ti Nkeso Rode*, *Charity Begins at Home* (Fig. 96) captures the theme of discipline.

He composes *Ilela Ti Nkeso Rode*, *Charity Begins at Home* with two children, a container with spilling food items and a mother instilling discipline by using the cane. Aesthetically, the artist creates the painting naturalistically with the anatomy correctly rendered, which portrays the artist a good draughtsman. The background is a woven circle of hues, tints and shades. The painting has some depth. However, the transition between the door and outside is poorly articulated. The door never had lintel, a wall and inner space. Indeed, it is rather a frame in space. However, what the door lacks is available in the container, showing depth and contrast between inner and outside environment.



Fig. 96: *Ilela Ti Nkeso Rode* (Charity Begins at Home), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 75 cm, 2008.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Contextually, *Ilela Ti Nkeso Rode* reflects discipline that ensures a better society, using the legend, ñcharity begins at homeò, in a society that is morally decaying. The artist believes that Nigeria has missed it in the 1980s when children at school age began to be pregnant indiscriminately, giving birth to children uncontrollably. He believes that such girls who suddenly became mothers were ought to still be under the tutelage of their parents. Since they lack the qualities of good parents, they cannot give what they lack to their own children. These children have grown to become problem in the society.

Conversant with these, *Ilela Ti Nkeso Rode* never ceases to condemn indiscipline, never sparing the rod to spoil the child.



Fig. 97: *Obowonkori* (The Sower), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2008.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Agriculture has serious implications on the economy. Government has always emphasized the place of agriculture in nation building. The artist also joins in the crusade for agrarian economy through his paintings. *Obowonkori*, The Sower (Fig. 97) depicts agrarian economy, using a farmer at farm as a model. The artists compositionally produce *Obowonkori*, The Sower with one figure planting seeds. Aesthetically, the painting shows

a correct rendition of anatomy in realism. The foreground is cast in circles of red while the background is vegetative, portraying the foliage of maize, which reinvigorates the theme of labour. Contextually, *Obowonkori* believes in an agrarian society and encourages it. Since the discovery of oil in Olomu in 1956, Nigerian governments have ceased virtually to acknowledge the gains of agriculture. A country, which once depended on agriculture, now emphasizes oil sector to the detriment of others. *Obowonkori* here challenges such emphasis with a call through art to turn to agriculture.

To a child, the mother means everything. When Ikpoza was a child, his mother meant every thing to him. She was great and he thought every woman was as great as she was. However, while he was grown up, he began to see women differently. His new discovery shortly began to reflect in his Ara art, which portrays some women with altered features in a devastated mood. *Iroro Aye* (Fig. 98) depicts a woman who is twisted in her thoughts that manifest in her altered physique. Compositionally, the painting shows an image of a reclining female figure with twisted anatomy and silhouette of human figures. Aesthetically, the artist highlights her head in her hands in a toned circle. Her hair drapes down her breasts like waterfalls. He articulates the background of the painting with silhouette of human figures. At the foreground, a wrapper in several folds covers part of the figure whose forms show muscles that stand at edge. *Iroro Aye* is a stylized and anatomically altered image with transition at the waist area being mechanical and the legs joining the torso at the back. The five figures in silhouette at the background seem not to be part of the painting except that somehow they are linked to the reclining figure with some straps as connectives. This linkage transforms what ought to be a cacophony of visual experience into a pleasant one.



Fig. 98: *Iroro Aye*, Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 76 cm, 2011.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Contextually, *Iroro Aye* depicts the twisted mind in times of stress. It captures this symbolically with twisted anatomy and silhouette of four female figures to represent the four stages in the life of women. The first silhouette from the right represents girlhood and the thinking that associates with it that the world is a bed of roses. The second one is a young woman, showing the desire to marry. She wants to marry a wealthy man and have babies. The third one signifies childbearing. The final one is the old age, where she walks supported with a stick. This painting is successful for its communicative appeal, depending largely on composition and application of colours. The juxtaposition of forms

and an overall grayish frame of the painting define the challenges resulting to a confused and pensive mood.

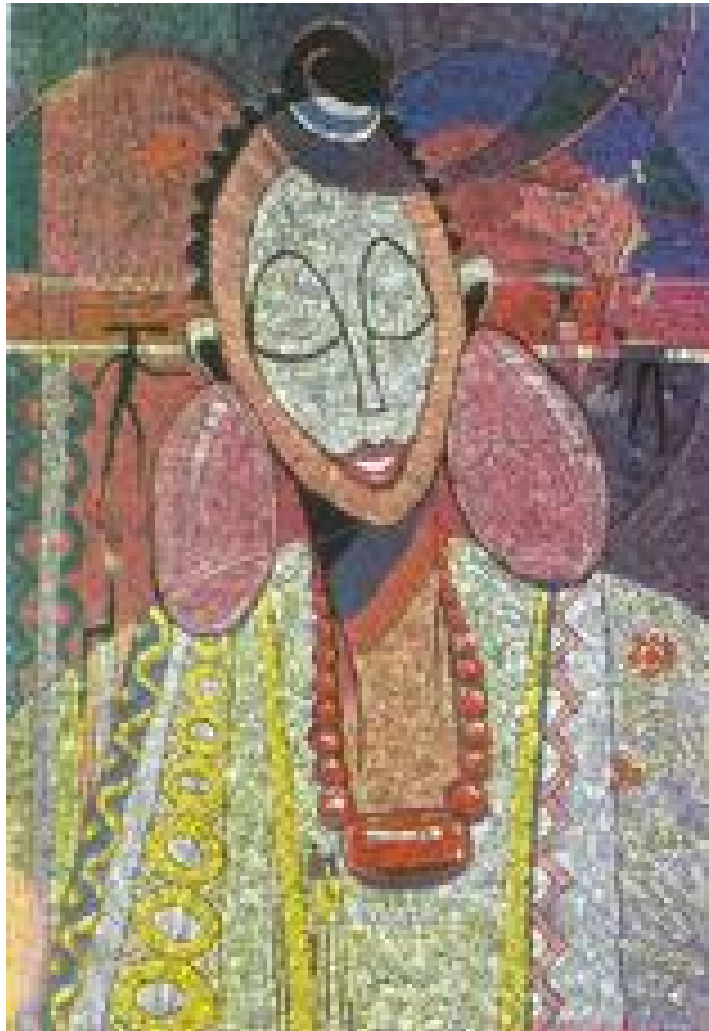


Fig. 99: *Face*, Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

There are many African dimensions of beauty, the cultural and structural beauty. Africans prefer the first to the second. Ikpoza, an African, also thinks along this line and he uses his paintings to give credence to it. He uses beautiful structures and ornaments to portray physical beauty but condemns it in favour of virtuous beauty he sees as innate and cultural. *Face* (Fig. 99) comments emphatically on virtuous beauty in relation to

culture. He composes this painting as a stylized and ornamental female portrait with beautiful structure. The portrait is heavily draped with ornaments on a background of a web of design in circles, horizontal strap and miniature silhouette of two human figures. Aesthetically, the artist alters the anatomy of the image.

Face combines abrupt and smooth transition. The minor forms on the stylized face have abrupt transition. The eyes are conical, the nose is a ridge and the mouth is represented with two sharp lips. The hair, ears and earrings are attached to the head mechanically. However, the neck and the shoulders transit into a broad flat torso. The traditional musical instrument at the background and the native beads tie the image to a cultural setting. The background and image in hues of red, purple and yellow creates unity and rhythm with a sense of coherence that reflect mastery of technique and intent.

Contextually, the artist uses *Face* to portray beauty in two connotations, the physical and the innate. While the physical beauty is structural and decorative, the innate has to do with cultural attitude acceptable to a society. Ikpoza, in his characteristic maturity of thought and technical execution, now condemns the physical beauty in favour of cultural beauty. He reveals his technical eloquence of execution. He produces the painting in stylization instead of in realism to portray beauty yet he was able to achieve his aim by marriage of technique and execution. The success, therefore, lies in the use of colour harmony, rhythmic lines and unity between the image and canvas.

Ikpoza's artistry is very revealing in both figure and scenery paintings. In his naturalistic paintings, he aptly articulates African symbols, concept and motifs in amazing style, which depict mastery of execution of forms in a highly controlled application of colours. A trained painter in the Federal Polytechnic, Auchi and *Ara Art*

Studio, Lagos, in the manner of orthodox academy and African concept respectively, Ikpoza's scenery paintings are a clear show of an amalgam of the two experiences. The artist's scenery paintings reveal also the vanishing point that marks off land and sky, which is missing in most African paintings, especially those of his master. The scenery paintings portray Ikpoza a painstaking artist with a high sense of nature, mood and colour. *Yamaa III*, Evening Market, (Fig. 100) portrays natural scenery of a cattle market, which encompasses cattle, vegetation and human figures dressed to reflect Hausa cattle rearers. The figures and the vegetation are given emphasis in naturalism.

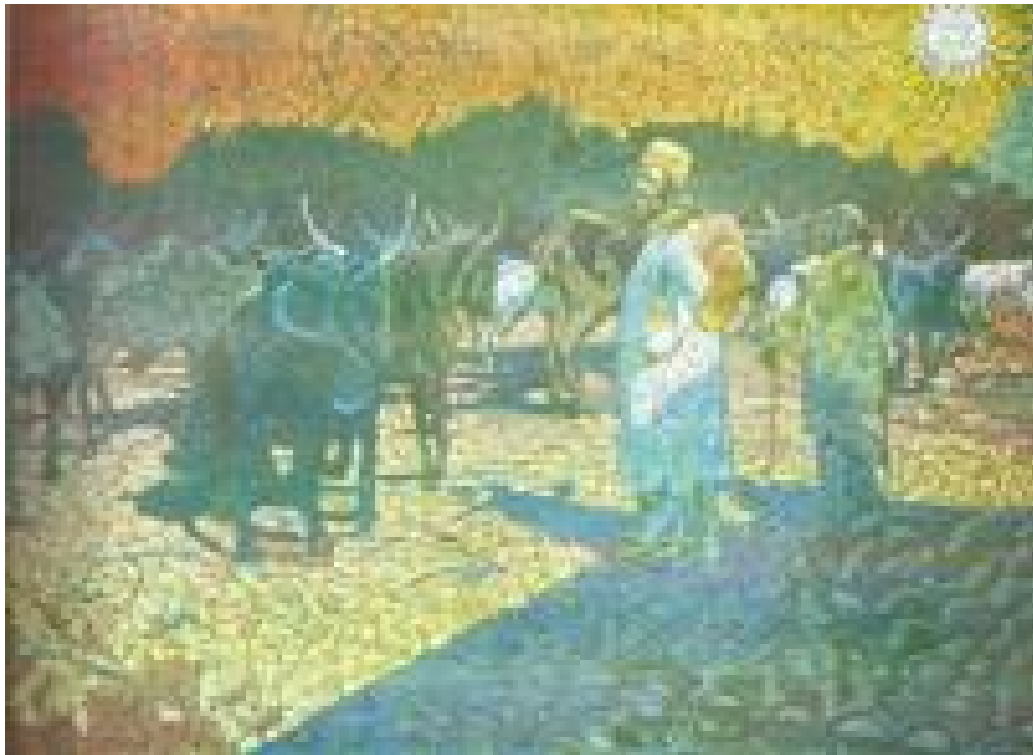


Fig. 100: *Yamaa III* (Evening Market), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 80 cm × 68 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

He aesthetically divides the foreground of *Yamaa III* into two, one part yellowish and the other greenish. The background also shows two divisions, one part with green vegetation and the other with yellow sky, which have a white sun, a kind of contradiction

as an evening weather. However, the foreground, the animal and human figures reflect the yellow sky accordingly. He creates depth by the use of aerial perspective in a hazy evening with a smoky weather. He articulates the canvas to be a web of straight, angular and circular lines that portray highly expressive images. Indeed, this misty painting reminds one of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Conceptually, the artist portrays a source of Nigerian economy, which is agriculture. Though Ikpoza reflects this aspect of the economy, he queries the local handling where the farmers roam about with their cattle, destroying people's crops, messing up the environment and thereby breeding diseases.



Fig. 101: *Ikuoma Kugbe* (Unity), J. Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

A meticulous painter, the artist shows interest in many aspects of the society. Exposed to life in the riverine area early in life, the artist occasionally returns to life in the area with *Ara* art. *Ikuoma Kugbe*, Unity (Fig. 101) uses canoeists to express unity

among Nigerians in realism. He aesthetically uses the canoeists to separate the foreground from the background in the painting. He renders the foreground as a bluish sea while the background, which he laces with linear motifs, yellowish. The canoeists draped in blush cap and yellow ochre, introduces depth into the painting. The figures that extend from the observer are smaller and less vivid. However, the sizes of the paddles do not agree with the depth introduced by the human figure. Nevertheless, the action of paddling results into waves and splashes that makes the painting interesting.

Conceptually, *Ikuoma Kugbe* agitates for peace in a troubled Nigeria. The artist believes that the activities of Boko Haram in the northern part of the country and the unrest from the militants in the Niger Delta seek to cripple the country. The country seems divided on political and regional crisis. The artist through this painting is calling for unity among the people wherein there is progress.

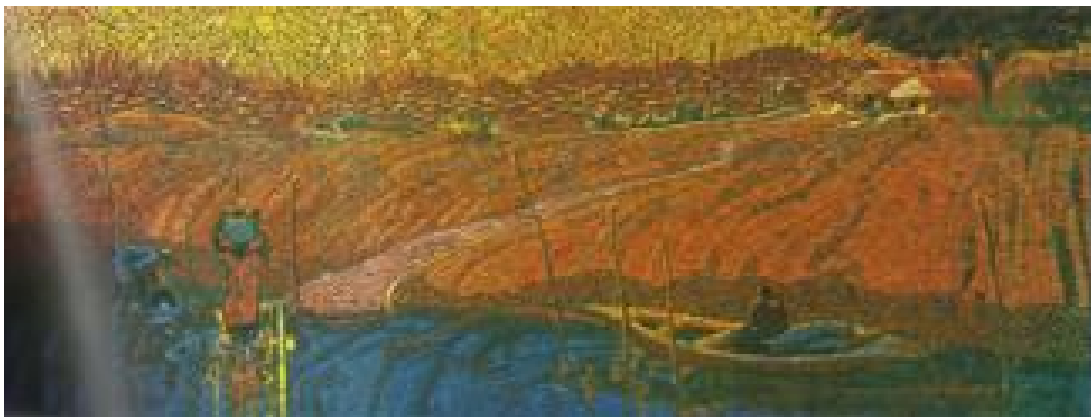


Fig. 102: *Akpo* (Life), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 124 cm × 51 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Akpo, Life (Fig. 102) is also a testimony to life in the riverine area. The artist articulates the painting with African symbols and motifs in a style that commands mastery of forms, using hues in their best values. He composes a vast land, a river bank

on which are some houses and vegetation. The artist aesthetically uses the land to separate the foreground from the background in the painting. The foreground is a blue river with draped human figures. Their drapery reflects the dominant hues of red and blue river were some people fetch water from while one person is canoeing. He creates the background as red vegetation, which seems to blend with the land.



Fig. 103: *Generosity*, Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

However, both the land and the vegetation have no effect on the river. The artist aesthetically creates depth with size and position of the houses, showing distance from the river. Conceptually, *Akpo* captures life in the riverine area where man depends on seafood and water for domestic use instead of pipe borne water. The painting implicitly decries lack of provision of social amenities to an area from which government extracts crude oil. Meanwhile, the people are suffering from the challenges of ecology occasioned

by oil spillage. Land has become infertile, fish become extinct and water is polluted; all of which *Akpo* condemns.

The artist captures the society with his art works. He is aware that society lacks the will to give freely. Indeed, society wishes to receive rather than giving. However, the artist believes that this practice is against the wish of God. Therefore, he uses *Generosity* (Fig. 103) to capture the theme of giving, using the female figure as a channel of water supply like a model of gift. The artist composes the painting with a domineering female figure that holds a bowl, which channels water from the spring. Other human figures swim and fetch water from the pool. A busy footpath leads from the village to the spring. The surrounding shows bright green vegetation. The female figure heavily drapes in heavy headgear, earrings, beads that hang from the neck to a heavy breasted-chest, top and wrapper.

Aesthetically, the artist creates the domineering figure in *Generosity* in naturalism with forms that transit smoothly. The choice of for the use of primary colours helps to define the natural habitat. He creates depth as aerial and volumetric perspective. The volume of the human figures clearly reveals distance. The source of light is unambiguous. Contextually, *Generosity* portrays the contact between the giver and the receiver, the joy and blessings in giving. The artist uses the work to condemn the lack of giving in the society and advises humanity to attempt it.

Like literature, the visual arts document the daily life of the society. In this regard, art has participated prominently in documenting the economy, politics, culture, education and transportation. In keeping faith with this, Ikpoza uses *Masuaiki Shinkafa* (Fig. 104) to capture an aspect of the economy of the northern part of the country using rice farming as

a model of their economy. He composes the painting with human figures that use basins to filter rice in a rice farm. The artist drapes the female figures in headgear, bangles, dress and wrapper. Aesthetically, the artist creates the figures in naturalism with a high sense of proportion, line quality, balance and rhythm. The foreground shows warp surfaces with rice shaft. The background is a carpet with a web of lines. The dominance of hue of red at the background highlights the figures in shades of blue and green. The rice rushes from the raised containers in a swift movement, which compels the viewer to follow the rhythm that begins with the hand raised above the head and ends at the feet.



Fig. 104: *Masuaiki Shinkafa*, Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 60 cm, 2011.
© Jonathan Ikpoza.

Contextually, the artist comments satirically on manual labour. The artist captures manual labour to symbolize a rather peasant economy. The satire, *Masuaiki Shinkafa*, derides government, which at this time of civilization seems to fail to come to terms with the level of development in other countries. Non-mechanized farming in the country defines the poor level of the economy and Ikpoza derides it, condemns it and uses *Masuaiki Shinkafa* to make a clarion call to all stakeholders to brace up with the challenges to revamp the economy.



Fig. 105, *Ori Eni Lawure II* (Head, a Man's Fortune), Jonathan Ikpoza, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 60 cm, 2006.

© Jonathan Ikpoza.

The artist remains umbilical in his connection to the matrix of culture. Giving the central role in keeping faith with the measure to preserve culture, artists also known for their probing knowledge into the future are often expected to show the level of culture in

the future. In a sense, the level of the culture of certain communities are interpreted or projected in the arts of such communities. In this vein, Ikpoza uses *Ori Eni Lawure II, Head, a Man's Fortune* (Fig. 105) to probe into the Nigerian future in which, if the present trend of corruption persists, only rot and decadence will define Nigeria. Compositionally, *Ori Eni Lawure II* is one-figure portrait in symmetry. The artist drapes it in a cap, a pair of spectacles, beads and *agbada*, a flowing garment, with heavy creases of deep undercut. The figure smiles with fixed gaze on a distant object. The attire radiates affluence. Aesthetically, the artist casts the figure in frontal plane of reference with the head slightly twisted at the neck to an angle. The minor forms on the face exist in naturalistic mold and transits smoothly into one another while they grow mildly from the underlying structure. Richly draped, the figure uses its right hand to gather the *agbada* in place with a sense of satisfaction and pride. The flora canvas shows cocoa fruits at the background.

Contextually, the artist captures affluence with *Ori Eni Lawure II*, using rich drapery in the dialectics of human history. Ikpoza provides a background to the affluence; cocoa was once the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The cocoa farmers earned legitimate income from it and their consciences were relaxed by it as a mark of the dignity of labour. However, today the dignity of labour has been forced into oblivion and ñquick Moneyò, better still; ñBlood Moneyò has taken over the society. The Nigerian society is gripped with fear; arm robbers, kidnappers, ñ419ò operators, corruption in government circles, ñBoko Haramò, ñObutsmanò and hired killers have taken over the society. Affluence can no longer be traced to a genuine source. The source of wealth is no

longer anyone's business. Ikpoza sees these in the society and ironically uses *Ori Eni Lawure II* to condemn it.

The survey of the works above reveals Ikpoza's uses of imageries in a peculiar way to signify existence. The artist selects and arranges forms, colour values, traditional motifs and themes in the works to evoke an image of a socio-cultural area, Nigeria. Though the artist is yet to achieve a notable individual style other than *Ara* style, the tone of socio-cultural reform in his works is very clear and consistent. *Ayo, Ukuenri, Iroro Aye, Face, Ilela Ti Nkeso Rode and Akpo* are masterpieces. The themes and titles of works are poetic, conveying great feel. The master's colour influence on him is also great. Above all, the artist's manner of articulating *Ara* art style with the angle of his palette knife is worthy of commendation.

Abolore A. Awojobi

Another disciple of Araism is Abolore A. Awojobi who was born in Mushin, Lagos State but an indigene of Igbeyin, Abiokuta, Ogun State. He had his primary and secondary school education in Mushin. He obtained NCE Fine and Applied Arts in Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta in 2001. He later studied *Ara* art under Mufu Onifade in 2003. Abolore A. Awojobi has also obtained BA Fine and Applied Arts in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has participated in many art exhibitions. In an interview, Abolore A. Awojobi reveals, "Art is nature, pleasure and expression of thoughts." He adds, "It (art) is absolutely fascinating."⁵

Stylistic study classifies Abolore's works into two. His early works show a great evidence of circles. By that, one can argue that his individual style in Araism is circle-shape pattern. This is clear in his early works selected here. However, his recent works

such as *Agba Ntara*, *Aged Pride* and *One Accord* produced in 2012, show a total break away from circle to straight, angular, curvature and natural lines of vegetation. His colour schemes have changed from light green and reddish purple to light yellowish green and off-white. However, the two stages retain naturalism. Even in *One Accord*, the human figure vase maintains naturalism. Thematically, culture, affection and nature seem to dominate Abolore's thinking.



Abolore A. Awojobi, 2007
© Mufu Onifade.

Like Ikpoza, Abolore A. Awojobi is a realist. His works such as *The Burning Candle* (Fig. 106) and others give vent to his assertion, "Art is nature, pleasure and expression of thoughts" in articulated African symbols, concepts and motifs wrapped in

mastery of forms and deployment of colour values. *The Burning Candle*, particularly, symbolizes wasted Nigerian economy with a stick of burning candle.



Fig. 106: *The Burning Candle*, Abolore A. Awojobi, temper/acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm, 2007.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

Compositionally, *The Burning Candle* (Fig. 106) uses a controlled colour splash of three human heads, which emanate from a burning candle in abstraction. It articulates the minor forms on the faces in a manner that they vanish into the canvas. It creates unity between the images and the canvas in a manner that they are inseparable. An indoor

painting, the artist separates the deep grey foreground from the light grey background with a line in the painting. He tones down the gray background that blends with the candle in off-white to emphasize the human heads, which together contrast the darker foreground. The background fades upwards, leaving the candle burning in light green and red.

Contextually, *The Burning Candle* alludes to wasted Nigerian economy. Indeed, Abolore uses the painting to deride the irony of hunger in abundance. He decries corruption in high places. Like the impressionists, Abolore does not care in this painting about accurate representation of forms but arrangement of forms to communicate his intentions and instill in the beholder a change of attitude. With its vegetative look, the painting succeeds in the realm of impressionism.

In the description of a society by a writer or the visual artist, he is at liberty to choose any form of storytelling. Satire is a convenient form for many. Abolore also finds the form convenient in describing the government and the subjects in the country through his paintings. Satirically, *A Njade Lo* (Fig. 107) captures derailment in government functions, using a landscape in which a hen and its chicks symbolically move in different directions. He composes the painting with birds, two circles of hues of green at the centre with vegetation, a body of water and a mountain. The birds in hues off-white and brown, depict a high sense of anatomical mastery. The foreground is a lawn of shades of green nurtured by a river. The large circles of green at the centre seem to be the thrust of the painting. Contextually, *A Njade Lo* alludes to poor leadership and followership. It exaggerates the size of the mother hen above that of the chicks symbolically to portray government as too arrogant to understand the plight of the chicks, the subjects. The artist

believes that government clearly separated from the people and that the functionaries feed fat and do not care for the needy as against the manifesto. The anatomy of the chickens and choice of colour hues and value are appropriate. However, the two big circles at the centre do not relate perceptively to other parts of the painting.



Fig. 107: *A Njade Lo*, Abolore A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm, 2007.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

The artist also devotes his works to culture. Remarkably, he gives equal attention to all subjects in African concept, idiom and motifs. *Owo Genge* (Fig. 108) captures a society in a light mood, using models of cultural dance. Composed with two female dancers draped in cultural attire in an outdoor painting, *Owo Genge* takes time off from the bustling and hustling activities to commemorate the ancestors. The message is clear though the dancers are anatomically poor. The painting achieves unity and rhythm with the figures linking the background and foreground in well chosen hues, tone and value.

However, the first figure seems floating while the second one, having some proportional challenges, vanishes into the foreground at the feet.

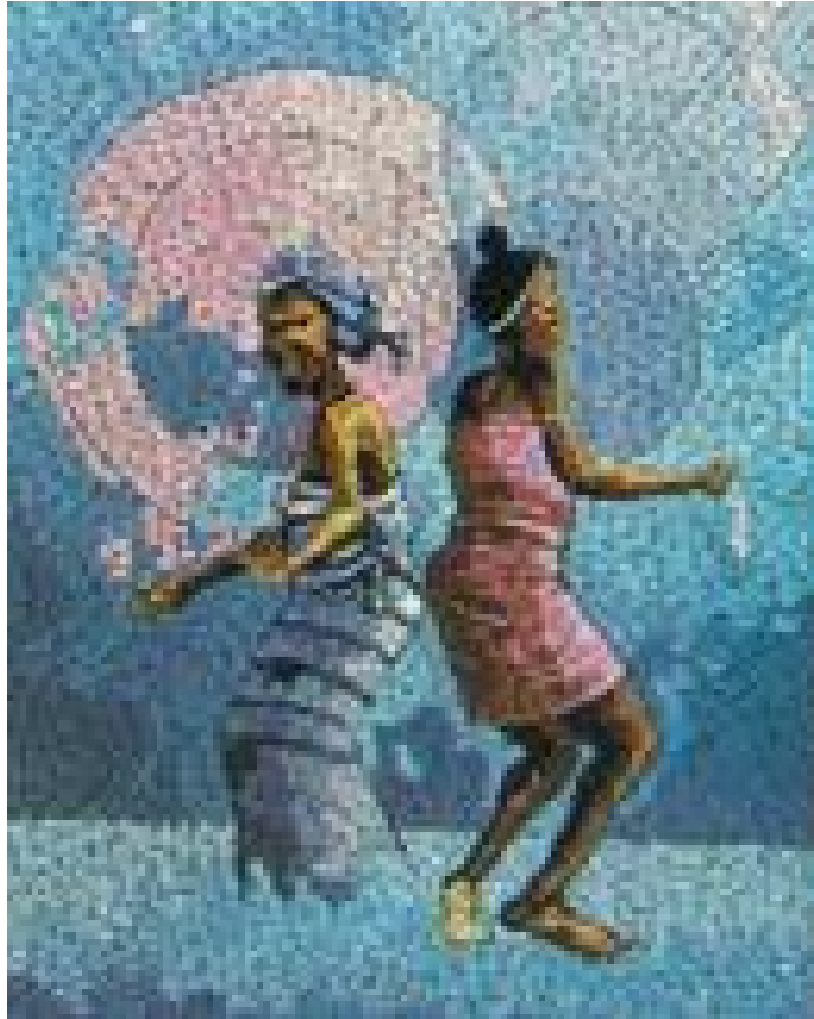


Fig. 108: *Owo Genge*, Abolore A. Awojobi,
acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm, 2007.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

Thematically, Abolore uses *Owo Genge* to reflect a society in merrymaking, engaged in a traditional dance. Traditional dance encompasses the life of a people, revealing their strength and weaknesses. Though it is transient, it is the performance of verbal art and its relevance. The dance conveys the theatrical, dramatic and sentiments of

the people, speaking straight from the unadulterated worldview of the people. It comes to life around the drums, which spark up the feel and tempo, and in the ecstasy of songs, the form and content of dance emerge. Though Abolore believes that people are facing challenges, which call for sobriety, he uses *Owo Genge* to encourage everyone to dance away his sorrow.



Fig. 109: *Behind every successful Man*, Abolore A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm, 2007.

© Abolore A. Awojobi.

Artists take joy in a stable society. They use their works to show commitment to peace and progress, believing that the traditional family setting is the mainstay of the society. Men dominate the public life of many societies. Some are successful while others

are not. Abolore, therefore, believes that the background of the successful ones has some implications in their success. *Behind every Successful Man* (Fig. 109), therefore, captures the background of some successful men, using the model of an obedient and hardworking wife. The painting is compositionally a female figure weaving a mat in a sitting posture.

The figural painting is aesthetically naturalistic. Though the figure is seating, there is no evidence of a foreground. However, the artist is able to manipulate the figure in such away that the deep shade around the imaginary line of division between foreground and background seems to be there. The usual Abolore's circle style takes the centre of the canvas though with a different colour scheme. The circle of highlight and thrust enhances the figure in white-green-white against the background of hues of red. The mat in patches of green and red further ties the painting in a unified and coherent visual exercise. Conceptually, Abolore depicts behind the scene about successful men in the Nigerian society. The artist condemns women who wait on their husbands for sustenance, arguing that women must support their husbands by earning some income. He asserts that men who are given moral and financial support by their wives are more successful and he encourages women to support their husbands.

In his commitment to the pursuit of peace and progress, Abolore holds humanity in high esteem. He believes that man has the capacity for self-esteem and realization of set goals. He uses his art to create awareness of man's capacity to attaining self-actualization. *Atelewo Eni, Self Realization* (Fig. 110) visually characterizes this feat in man, employing the model of a family in African concept, symbols and motifs. The painting shows self-realization as a mark of reasoning, determination and hard work. He composes this work of art naturalistically with four figures in dominance of hues of

purple, green and brown. Aesthetically, the figures show mastery of anatomy and colour application. The painting strives to use hues and their values to reveal the individual forms to achieve resemblance and coherence of composition. Mastery of the choice and application of colours reveal the unity between the canvas and images as one and indivisible entity. Thematically, Abolore makes a strong visual statement on society, using the portraits of Babaginda and family. No one may have better self-actualization than a president of a country may.

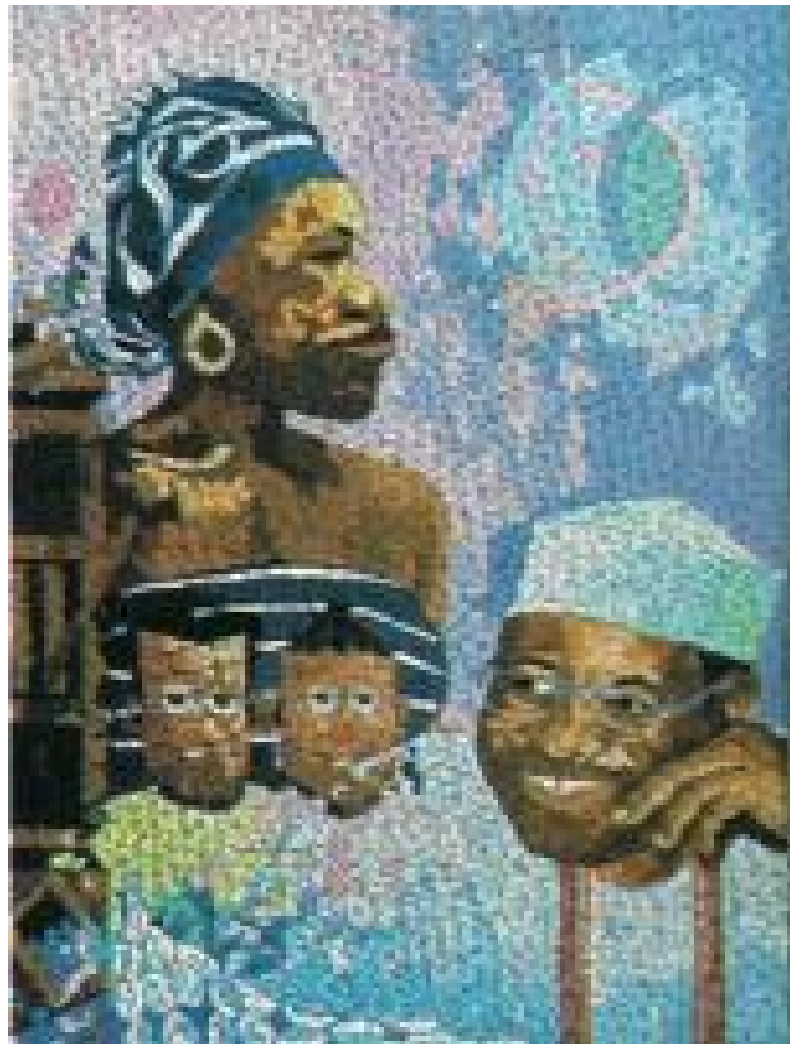


Fig. 110: *Atelewo Eni* (Self Realization), Abolore A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 51 cm, 2007.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

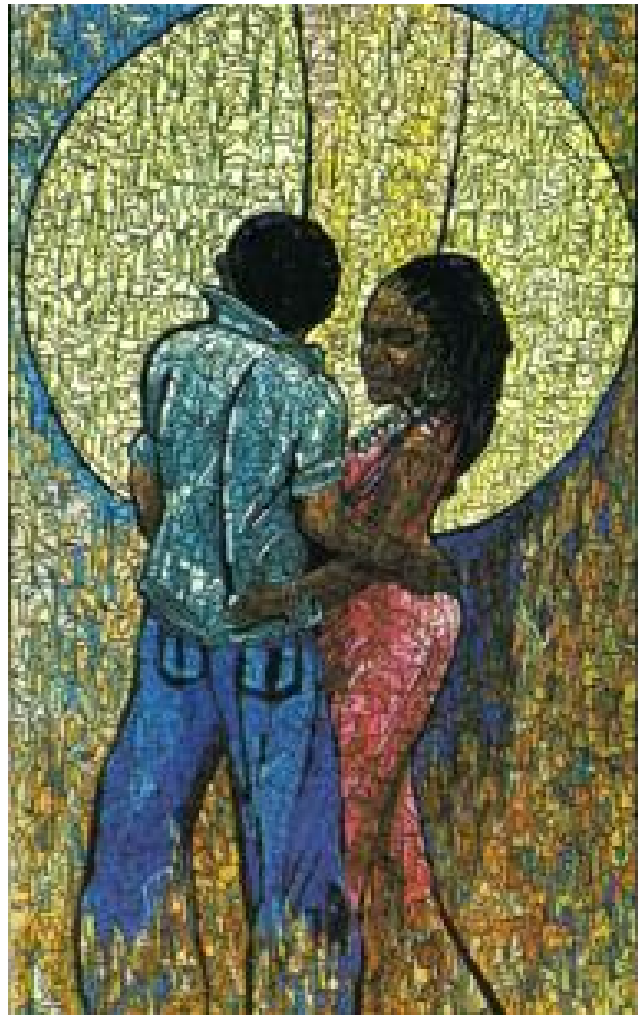


Fig. 111: *February 14*, Abolore A. Awojobi,
acrylic on canvas, 51 cm × 77 cm, 2007.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

Like a writer who is a sociological being, the visual artist instills the consciousness of the environment in people, condemning the wrongs and encouraging virtue. In this vein, Abolore captures romance in the society with *February 14* (Fig. 111), which he composes a female and male figures in a romantic embrace. Aesthetically, the artist highlights the two standing figures in his usual circle of yellowish green. Draped in blue and red, the figures are central in the composition where they are used as connectives to the highlight and the entire canvas of deeper yellowish green. The figures are cast in

naturalistic mould in an entire cool canvas that radiates love, which is capable of enticing the beholder into the mood. A master of expressive lines, the artist depends largely on curvilinearity to produce the figures and the underlying motifs.

Thematically, *February 14* is a strong statement on romance in campus. The artist visualizes an aspect of life on campus that school authority seems not to control. Implicitly, some students who do not go out alone at home find such opportunity at school interesting. They do not hesitate to use such opportunity, which they convert to mundane practices. The artist believes that this aspect of life on campus runs fowl of God's commandments and uses *February 14* to condemn it.

Abolore draws inspiration from the Bible but gives the story African motifs and interpretation. Some of his works, therefore, are applied biblical injunctions but with African connotation. *Eje, Covenant* (Fig. 112) captures the sanity of agreement, using a biblical injunction, covenant, but with African concept. He composes the painting with hands in circle to form a ball-shape at the centre with hues of red. Aesthetically, the artist carefully produces the thrust of the painting at the centre by boxing the picture plane with linear design. The hands are arranged in such away that the space between forms triangular shapes. The painting is flat, lacking any form of depth. However, the linear border has some expressive lines that make the painting interesting. The action at the centre agitates the mind, leaving such question as, what are the hands protecting? By this, the painting helps to retain further attention. The underlying design and colour point to the centre, which culminate into the signifier of covenant.

Contextually, Abolore deploys biblical injunction of the covenant of God with the Israelites in Nigerian mindset. He observes that "the devil has eaten deep into the fabric of

society so many people do not believe in honour and integrity. As a result, many marriages, enterprises and joint ventures fail. Politicians break faith with their manifestoes. Money laundry takes over commitment to party programmes in government circles. Many are given to vanity and artificiality. The artist, therefore, condemns many Nigerians for how they handle agreement with levity. He emphasizes that everyone should honour his own part of an agreement.



Fig. 112: *Eje (Covenant)*, A. A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 91 cm, 2008.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

Agba Ntara, Aged Pride (Fig. 113) also draws inspiration from biblical injunction: ñhonour your father and mother so that your days may be longò. In a figural painting, Abolore uses the model of an aged woman to portray the idea of God's creation

and the respect that follows. Composed with an aged female figure in an indoor painting that suggests the foreground as a carpet floor and the background as a coated wall with Plaster of Paris, Abolore aesthetically derived his motifs, symbols and forms from African mode of expression employing the ductility of hues of colour to achieve a unified and coherent thought. Leaning on the walking stick as prop with a hand on the waist, the figure tilts forward at the waist with drooping forms. However, *Agba Ntara*, Aged Pride seems to have some compositional challenges.



Fig. 113: *Agba Ntara* (Aged Pride), Abolore A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 81 cm × 42 cm, 2012.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

The female figure seems to have baldhead, which is unlike women. Nevertheless, the harmony derived in colour between the drapery and the wall in addition to correctness of anatomy and rhythmic flow are aesthetically a mark of mastery. Conceptually, *Agba Ntara* derides humanity who overturned the original plan of God and began to suffer. In that shortfall, humanity has been infested with all manners of evil and man no longer attains old age. The young ones have no respect for the few who are a little old. The artist is crusading for a holistic change of attitude.

Returning to satire, Abolore reflects a disintegrated society in dire need of unity. *One Accord* (Fig. 114) signifies Nigerian society in need of unity, using an abstracted flower vase of human figure containing a growing plant. He composes the vase as expressed kneeling figure attached to a container in an out-door painting with a yellowish green lawn as foreground and a deeper yellowish green vegetation that penetrates a purple sky as background. He produces the vase, plant and its coordinated foliage in off-white with little yellowish green. Thematically, Abolore uses *One Accord* to portray a chaotic society and asks for unity among the people. Humanity has many challenges and then faced with disunity, corruption, ineptitude and moral decadence. Humanity attempts to resolve her challenges, some cases, with war, which is in itself another challenge. In a world like this, it is only to write that Abolore Awojobi signifies unity with plant foliage, which naturally has a coordinated movement and rhythm. As a result of this unity among all the members of the plant, the plant is able to bear fruits, which the human figure watches with admiration.



Fig. 114: One Accord, Abolore A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 86 cm × 46 cm, 2012.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

Abolore lives up to his belief about art: “Art is nature, pleasure and expression of thoughts. It is absolutely fascinating”. He expresses his serious thoughts on society pleausurably, revealing the bane in society through his art. His *E Go Betta* (Fig. 115) stabs the central of injustice in the Nigerian society, but who would listen? *E Go Betta*, though comic as it seems, is beyond the face value and pierces deep into pension as it affects the large population of the retirees in Nigeria. He composes the painting symmetrically with

two human figures seated back to back on a wooden chair. The artist drapes one in Police uniform with two straps as a Corporal and a heavy beret that no longer fits. His forms have begun to droop with age. He supports his chin with the one hand while he leaves the other to dangle and serve as a signifier of the state of his hopeless mind. His entire frame also signifies suffering.



Fig. 115: *E Go Betta*, A. A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas/84 cm × 76 cm, 2008.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

A retired teacher, the other figure drapes in a cap, a pair of glasses, shirt, a pair of trousers and shoes and opens a large book that he never reads. Old and drained, he cannot

concentrate on reading, but looks into space expecting to see a distant object. Will the pension ever come? Aesthetically, the artist creates the painting in naturalism. He maintains his canvas of flora design, a web of crackles with hues of off-white and green dominating. The use of a combination of different shades of hues of green and red enliven the canvas and gives it power to attract and retain the attention of the viewer. The bright hue of red on the rank of the Corporal and the angular shape at the side of the seat rescue the painting from a dull outlook. Contextually, the artist reacts violently to the management of pension in the country. The book and the uniform are symbolically used to portray two professions that are models of the doom in the government's mismanagement of pension scheme. Many pensioners have died while queuing with the hope to receiving their pension. Many have also died without receiving their pension, which accumulated for years. The artist's piercing comment is very revealing:

They are comrades in squalor, partners in neglect and professionals without professional payé One imparts knowledge to nurture the society, the other ensures utmost securityé However, here they are in a balloon of neglect.⁶

Abolore is a social commentator who deploys art as a compass to point to the right direction. His *Oju Orun*, Abundant Space (Fig. 116) is not just one of his works, but an allegory on Nigeria. This work uses birds in space to talk to some Nigerians who believe that they must destroy or kill to get to the next level of life experience. The artist aesthetically creates the sky in straps of green in circles with an underlying flora design. All the birds in hue of brown are soaring in different height. They might have started from the same place but as they soar, the space gets widening. Thematically, *Oju Orun* acknowledges the bustling and hustling in the society. It captures the sharp practices and

man's evil to man in the country where everyone ought to live freely. In a country where one wakes up to the sad news of more than one hundred people, adult and children, murdered in their sleep or a plane crashed into a building and all occupants and residences burnt to death without rescue, it is only proper that *Oju Orun* talks to the people. In a country where same sex marriage is in vogue or under age marriage is encouraged or where Medicare turns death trap, it is imperative *Oju Orun* talks to the people.



Fig. 116: *Oju Orun (Abundant Space)*, Abolore A. Awojobi, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 75 cm, 2008.
© Abolore A. Awojobi.

The selected works above clearly signify Abolore Awojobi as a social commentator who is heavily armed with the knowledge of the social needs of his people. The titles of his works clearly direct his audience to his position, his commitment to

doing it right. The crusade for a change in society by the artist is not in doubt. The abstract works are very philosophical. The careful deployment of colour value and motifs as model of light to a dark world is highly artistic.

Oluwambe Amodu



Oluwambe Amodu, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Oluwambe Amodu is another follower of Araism. Born in Lagos in March 19, 1983, he hails from Oyo State. He attended Oke-Odo High School, Lagos and Oronna High School, Ilaro, Ogun State, where he won the Best Student Price in Art in 2002. He did part-time studies in General Arts at the Yaba College of Technology in 2004. In 2006, he studied *Ara* art under Mufu Onifade and thereafter became a member of Araism Movement. Since then he has featured in many group art exhibitions. In an interview,

Oluwanbe Amodu reveals, ñAraism is efficacious in the Nigerian arts cape. The future of Araism is bright and the prospects are wide.ò He alludes to the President of United States of America, Barack Obama, comparing his election to a great change and that he says, ñWe cannot see our environment change if we do not change it (through art).ò ⁷ The stylistic study of Amodu's *Ara* paintings proves that he is yet to establish an individual style. Generally, anyway, he is a realistic painter who depends largely on the power of costume for tact and witty communication. However, his master's colour and thematic influence on him is great.



Fig. 117: *Ipe (Calling)*, Olu Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 80 cm × 70 cm, 2007.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

In the pursuit of societal change, Amodu talks to the society through his paintings in religious and secular themes. He uses forms as signifiers with symbolic texture. *Ipe*, Calling (Fig. 117) captures reform. Using a single form composition, Amodu articulates a religious iconic and symbolic rectangular object, which is a signifier of Islamic scepter of power. This is in straps of varied shades of green. The top has lighter green, which is complemented at the base. In the characteristic manner of Araism painting, Amodu shows no need for a division between foreground and background rather he supplies shadow at the base of the object to act as foreground. However, the shadow of the object casts wrongly on both sides of the object.

Aesthetically, the artist uses colour intensity as connective to link the shadow cast and what ought to be the background thereby depicting a unified composition. Thematically, the painting is answerable to Islam of the North with its theme of holiness and salvation. Amodu uses the religious object to signify a call to spiritual power, which enables the people to have a sense of good behaviour that ensures peace in the society. *Ipe* is functionally communicative, depending largely on iconographic costume.

One of the desires of a couple is to have children. It is a fact that some couple cannot get this desire to produce children. Some in this category adopt children while others die with hope unfulfilled. However, the issue of childbearing has been abused by many unmarried youths, involving in abortion, abandoning the newborn child or killing it outrightly. *Oju Meji*, Impact (Fig. 118) comments on childbearing in the society, using the married couple as a motif of excellence. In a composition of human figures in a standing pose, the couple and well-wishers dedicate the newborn child to God. Using the supple nature of the costume as a language in itself, Amodu explores the power of

costume to indicate the Yoruba as people in celebration. He also explores the value of colour with the dominance of hue of green to signify fertility. Aesthetically, the artist captures the couple in realism but the surrounding human heads are stylized. Contextually, *Oju Meji* condemns incessant childbearing outside marriage, as it is today common with young girls and boys. This has made birth control very difficult for the federal government and thereby contributing to inflation. Amodu, therefore, uses childbearing in marriage as a divine element real source of joy and blessing to society.



Fig. 119: *Oju Meji* (Impact), Olu Amodu, acrylic on canvas/92 cm × 92 cm, 2007.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Like a watchdog to the society, many artists report many aspects of the society, including the economy. Amodu plays this role in the reportage of the economy. He uses

Iduna-Dura, Transactions (Fig. 119) to report the state of the economy, evolving market scenery as symbolic element. *Iduna-Dura* articulates the forms of human figures and baskets containing tubers as motif of commerce. Aesthetically, the artist produces the forms in naturalistic mould with African costume, exploring the pliability of colour. Contextually, the artist makes a strong statement, using elastic supply where there is much supply but there is little or no demand for the goods. A market scene that ought to be busy is not. Amodu believes that demand equilibrium instead of inequilibrium is a better condition of the economy.



Fig. 119: *Iduna-Dura* (Transactions), Oluwambe Amodu, acrylic on canvas/76 cm × 65 cm, 2007.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

The artist returns to culture, using costume as a divine element of communication. *Jembe Drum* (Fig. 120) captures a motif of the talking drum with a serious theme of communication and entertainment as some aspects of the society. Compositionally, the artist articulates the drum on its iconographic value among the Yoruba people. Aesthetically, Amodu lucidly produces the yellowish green drum on a hide of deeper yellowish green, which is cast on a lighter yellowish green canvas, creating unity between canvas and image.



Fig. 120: *Jembe Drum*, Olu Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 91 cm, 2007.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Contextually, *Jembe Drum* portrays entertainment and communication with emphasis on costume. The drum among the Yoruba as a people plays a dual role. This is in respect of entertainment and a spirit medium with which the ancestral spirits communicate with and direct the living. Traditionally, man does not understand his environment but he wants to control and reorder it. Since he is incapable of doing that, he depends largely on the ancestral powers and spirits to do so for him, using rituals and dogmas. The drum, which serves as a medium became an iconographic cultural material to the people.

Some of Amodu's works such as *The Cross* (Fig. 121) focus on the role of religion, especially Christianity in the Nigerian society, using the Cross as symbol of crucifixion and salvation. It is a single composition of the cross with a strap of cloth coiling round it and spreading out at both ends. The painting is functionally communicative, depending largely on iconographic costume. The artist emphasizes interplay of forms and colour to achieve success in this painting, using costume as a definitive object and colour as embellishment. Thematically, *The Cross* portrays burden and salvation through Christianity. In a society that is froth with many forms of evil, where the Judiciary and many aspects of the Executive arm of the government, especially its Police Force, fail the country, the people may not hesitate to turn to religion for an answer. In a society that is bereft of peace, where militants, arm robbers and kidnapers take over the state, Amodu must be right to recognize the role of religion in ensuring peace in a society and use *The Cross* to attain grandeur.



Fig. 121: *The Cross*, Olu Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 85 cm × 50 cm, 2008.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Many communities recognize the role of the press on nation building. Government, organizations and individuals also recognize the laudable role of the press as informative, educative and entertaining. In his individual capacity, Amodu uses his art such as *Headlines* (Fig. 122) to give recognition to the role of the press. *Headlines* captures the role of the press in nation building through communication, using the newspaper as a delightful tool. It is composed of a human figure reading newspapers. The seated figure on a local bench in a newspaper stand is actually Mufu Onifade, which was

adopted from newsprint. Aesthetically, the painting is in realism, advancing portraiture to a point of recognition even with small figures. The mastery of forms and colour, using hues of red, green and blue as his usual colour scheme is not in doubt.

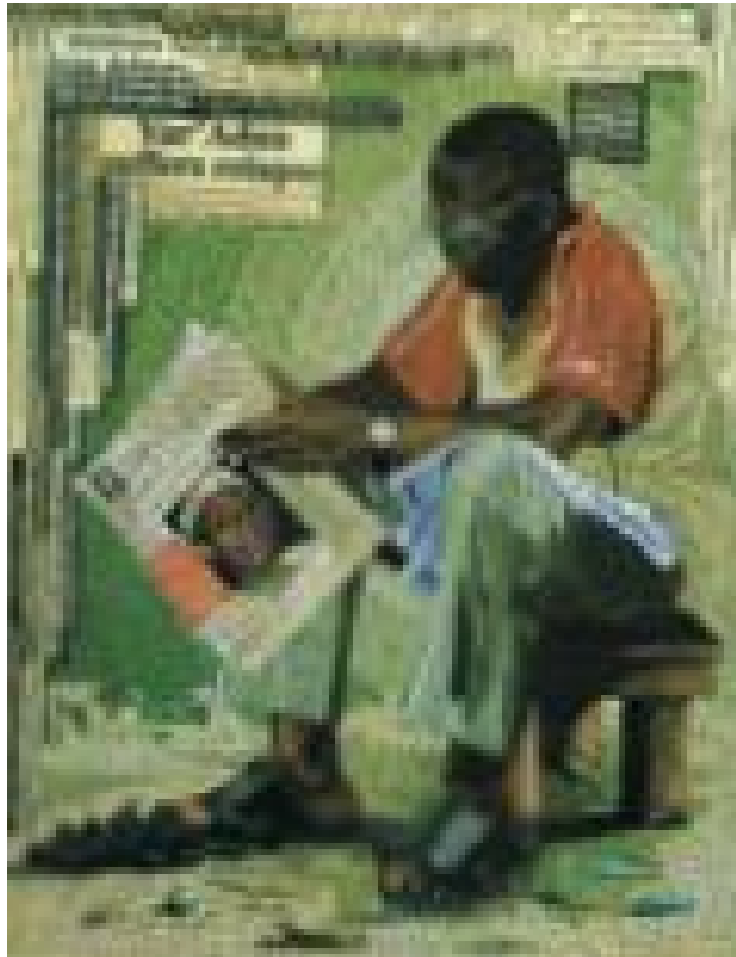


Fig. 122: *Headlines*, Olu Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 76 cm, 2010.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Thematically, Amodu articulates *Headlines* to portray the role of Mass Media in the Nigerian society. Using the iconic portraiture of a former president and caption of the late president Yar'Adua, the artist stresses Mass Media as a channel of a historical archive and a watchdog to government other than her informative role. In a way, the artist is also crusading for a literate society and thereby educating the masses on the importance

of reading the press. The exuding figure of the exponent of Araism reading newspapers launches him in intellectualism, which results in the many topical themes and standard of communication through *Ara* art.

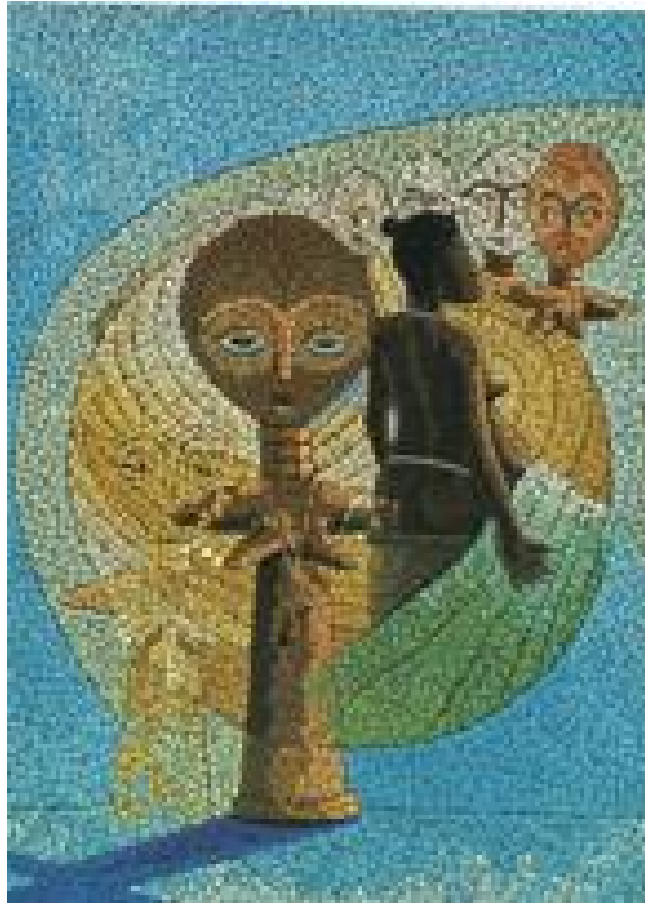


Fig. 123: *Spirit of Fertility*, Oluwambe Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 86 cm × 61 cm, 2009.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Like his master, Amodu also uses woodcarving style. *Spirit of Fertility* (Fig. 123) uses the woodcarving style in painting, which is a symbolic motif of fertility. The painting retains the wood character of the three figures in composition. Very revealing also is the character of fertility of the womb. Aesthetically, the figures in a spiral strap of yellow ochre and yellowish green are suspended from the foreground by the idol. For the

first time, the artist shows a line of division between the foreground and background in his painting, all with hues of blue. Contextually, *Spirit of Fertility* depicts man's attachment to the spirit world. The artist believes that man is incapable of meeting his spiritual needs. Consequently, he depends on the ancestors and spirits for his needs such as fertility, control of pestilence and issues of death.

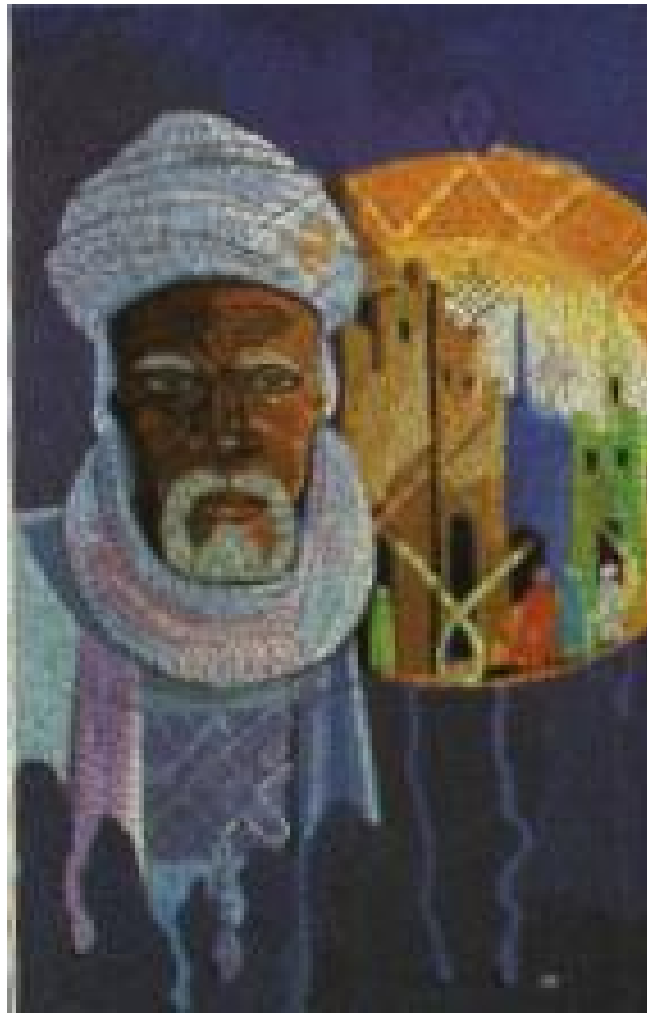


Fig. 124: *Northern Rep*, Olu Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 60 cm, 2010.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

The painter's themes also include politics. *Northern Rep* (Fig. 124) articulates the political class. Using light purple, the artist captures a male portrait realistically on deep

purple canvas. The portrait blends into the vast canvas. Beside the image is a circle of yellow ochre in which vast image of a mosque stands. The artist creates the portrait using the costume of Islamic faith thereby defining the image with the subject as one from the north, which the title suggests. Thematically, *Northern Rep* characterizes the political scene in Nigeria, using the image of a politician and mosque from the northern part of Nigeria. The artist believes that in the National Assembly many politicians forget the tenets of their religion as well as the needs of their constituency.



Fig. 125: *Ogun Omode* (The Peers), Oluwambe Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 70 cm, 2007.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Amodu expresses his disappointment with the Nigerian political class further with his paintings. *Ogun Omode*, The Peers (Fig. 125) is a satire on the political class. It uses

uncoordinated footmarks as abstract painting. Aesthetically, the artist uses a greenish wheel at the centre with lines emerging from it to different directions. The painting is flat, showing no depth and perspective. Contextually, Amodu uses *Ogun Omode* to deride the political class for lack of focus, but pursuing their own selfish ends instead of the needs of the constituency. He compares doing the will of the people to the narrow road, its inconveniences, endurance and reward.



Fig. 126: *Bogiri O Lanu* (Cracks on Harbour), Oluwambe Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 71 cm × 52 cm, 2008.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Satirically, Amodu responds to the pitfalls in the Nigerian system of governance, using *Bogiri O Lanu*, Cracks on Harbour (Fig. 126). The painting characterizes

governance in Nigeria, using lizards and allusion to cracks in the harbor. He articulates the wall and the lizards in different shades of green. The painting is flat but laced with meanings. Aesthetically, Amodu in his *Bogiri O Lanu* portrays corrupt government functionaries in Nigeria. The cracks in the wall are signifiers of Nigerian government and the lizards are the dubious government functionaries. *Bogiri O Lanu* decries corruption in high places and the lack of the political will to deal with it.



Fig. 127: *Reflection*, Oluwambe Amodu, acrylic on canvas/95 cm × 75 cm, 2011.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

The artist also uses his *Ara* paintings to address the totality of man, including his illness. *Reflection* (Fig. 127) addresses the weak human body in relation to the pitfalls

that are associated with medication, using a sick reclining figure on a chair. He indicates the reflex areas with the use of circles and rectangles as highlight. Like a portrait, the painting does not have foreground, which makes the figure, therefore, to seat on a chair in space. The painting is flat. The artist pays attention to communication and relies on the compositional effect to elicit the wisdom in the forms. However, the artist was able to achieve success with rhythmic flow and the deployment of colour value. Thematically, *Reflection* derides government for its lack of attention in the health sector. Many fake drugs are everywhere. Many doctors are unethical in practice. Some nurses are lovers of pleasure rather than being divine models of healthcare. Some of the paramedics frustrate the course of medication. The whole country seems to be turned upside-down. Unequivocally, *Reflection* is shouting for a new order.

Visual arts record and mirror the activities of man. It either condemns some or encourages some or sometimes just neutral. With *Almost There* (Fig. 128), the artist captures sports, using the motif of golf sports. He conceptualizes sports with a man who holds a golf club and squats on a light green foreground and deep green background. The one figure has a fix gaze into space. Draped in sports wears, it portrays correct anatomy, which portrays the artist's mastery of forms. The flow of the creases on the drapery naturally follows the suggested movement of the underlying structure. The left hand that forms an angle to the body enfolds space. The right hand holds the club, which stands vertically on the ground. The hand forms a cup on the tip of the club, which together penetrates into space. Contextually, Amodu, in *Almost There*, satirizes pool betting, which has made many poorer. The title of the work, *Almost There*, reflects the common exclamation among those involved in pool betting. Sometimes the title among them

metamorphoses to ñl nearly kill themò, and this becomes the metaphor for continuity in business, but he will never ñkill themò.



Fig. 128: *Almost There*, Oluwambe Amodu, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 78 cm, 2011.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Amodu believes that entertainment is an integral part of the society. Among his works that reveal this is *Maitre De Violino* (Fig. 129), using a violinist in the English format. He composes the painting in realism with a male figure that is playing violin.

Draped in hues of blue, the figure is articulated on a yellow ochre canvas. The artist aesthetically juxtaposes the hues of yellow ochre and blue on the figure and canvas thereby unifying the painting in a coherent feel. Thematically, *Amodu* reflects entertainment as an aspect of the society, which uses music in its unifying capacity among the people, ministering to their soul.



Fig. 129: *Maitre De Violino*, Oluwambe Amodu, mix media/100 cm × 80 cm, 2012.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

The world is a mixed grill. Some are sad while others are happy. Some are crying, others are laughing. Some are succeeding while others are failing. Some are burying the dead while others are making merriment. The artist acknowledges all that. However, he uses *Alubata* (Fig. 130) to portray music not only merriment, but also as a binding force in the society. It uses the motif of a drummer as a visual signifier. He composes the

painting with the traditional drummer draped in a cultural costume. The musical instrument is a two-sided drum. In Yoruba attire, the drummer looks at an imaginary audience and beats the drum from both sides in frenzy. Indeed, he is lust in ecstasy. The artist aesthetically blends the figure in hues of blue with a canvas of hues of light yellowish green to achieve a great feel in visual parlance.



Fig. 130: *Alubata*, Oluwambe Amodu, mixed media, 100 cm × 73 cm, 2012.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Contextually, *Alubata* portrays music as a binding force, using the drum as spirit medium through which the ancestors and the spirits have a grip on the living. The artist

believes that the spirits know all and are very powerful in the control of the affairs humanity. In fact, Amodu is also aware that the traditional belief of the presence of the ancestors among the living can hardly be separated from the African.

Culture is complex. Its complexity keeps history thriving. Historians, therefore, are traditionally concerned with finding out what occurred at a particular time and place. They work to establish facts and present it in a most valid manner. The work is valid only to the point that the historian is objective in the presentation of the account of the events covered. This manner, that the historian captures the purity of an entire age thereby unlocking the essence of a period and the worldview of the culture in question. In fact, historians work tirelessly to open up the meaning that defines the art, politics, literature and social behavior of a people at a point in time. The history painter also works assiduously in the manner of the historian. In this vein, Oluwambe Amodu, uses *Kemuye, Sunday Best* (Fig. 131) to capture acculturation in Nigeria. The artist captures this with a female figure draped in English dress and symbolic bible. He composes the painting with one human figure set for the church. The figure wears a big hat, a pair of spectacles, earrings and bead that hangs from her neck in a feminine manner. The female figure wears a gown and holds a copy of the bible to her rising chest with one hand and a handbag dangles from the other hand. She tilts the neck to her left hand, which continues the feminine gaiety. Her wristwatch is conspicuously displayed to tie church service to the importance of time. This is opposed to the idea of "African Time" that seems to have eaten deep into the root of the society. The synthetic flower on the hat penetrates into space. It identifies human being with nature, and that like the ripe and withered leave falls off the stem so shall the human being shall fall off and return as dust to dust.



Fig. 131: *Kemuye* (Sunday Best), Oluwambe Amodu, mixed media, 100 cm × 60 cm, 2012.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Contextually, *Kemuye*, *Sunday Best* launches art into historical painting. It records colonial influence on the Nigerian culture. In the past, the West colonized parts of Africa, making efforts to civilize Africans without respect to their institutions. Apparently, the effort of the West to civilize Africans without regard to their institutions was not only wrong but also destructive. For it is impossible to civilize a people by

endowing them with productive power having the capacity for permanent growth. *Kemuye* reveals that the people should be stimulated to civilize themselves by advancing their own methods and institutions. The immediate victim of these wrong and destruction is the culture of the people. Colonialism weakened those aspects of tradition that are custodian of culture and, better still, the assemblage of many arts. Colonialism brought foreign culture, which adulterated and destroyed the fabric that once held the people together. Today, many established practices are getting extinct and replaced with foreign usages. This account for *Kemuye*, in her own environment, she use foreign dress code and condemns her own culture and its expressions as heathen.

The artist creates forms assiduously. He attempts to strike a balance between appearance of forms and their true nature, especially with *Waiting* (Fig. 132). The female figure has bloated forms, rounded as they are idealized, but no; they capture essence. Divided by a line at the center that runs from the forehead down the back, her hair is packed into two. She wears a pair of earrings and tilts her neck to allow the head relax on her palm while seating astride on a settee. The hand that cups her head rests on her right lap while the other rests loosely on the arm of the settee. In a frontal axial movement, he creates her forms with gentle transition. Her forms and general frame are succulent. She looks into the void in expectancy; the man is yet to come.

The artist drapes *Waiting* in evening dress. Her breasts are penetrating the light off-white dress. The nipple is inviting. The wrapper is hanging loosely on her loin. The figure in naturalism relaxes with the mood of a lady in waiting, gazing straight into the unseen comer. Its lips are set for a kiss. The face itself shows some warmth and it is, indeed, very alive. Thematically, Amodu uses the *Waiting* to play up truth to nature,

especially as it affects the feminine world. In a meditative mood, the young girl must expect the male partner, almost losing the sense of her privacy.

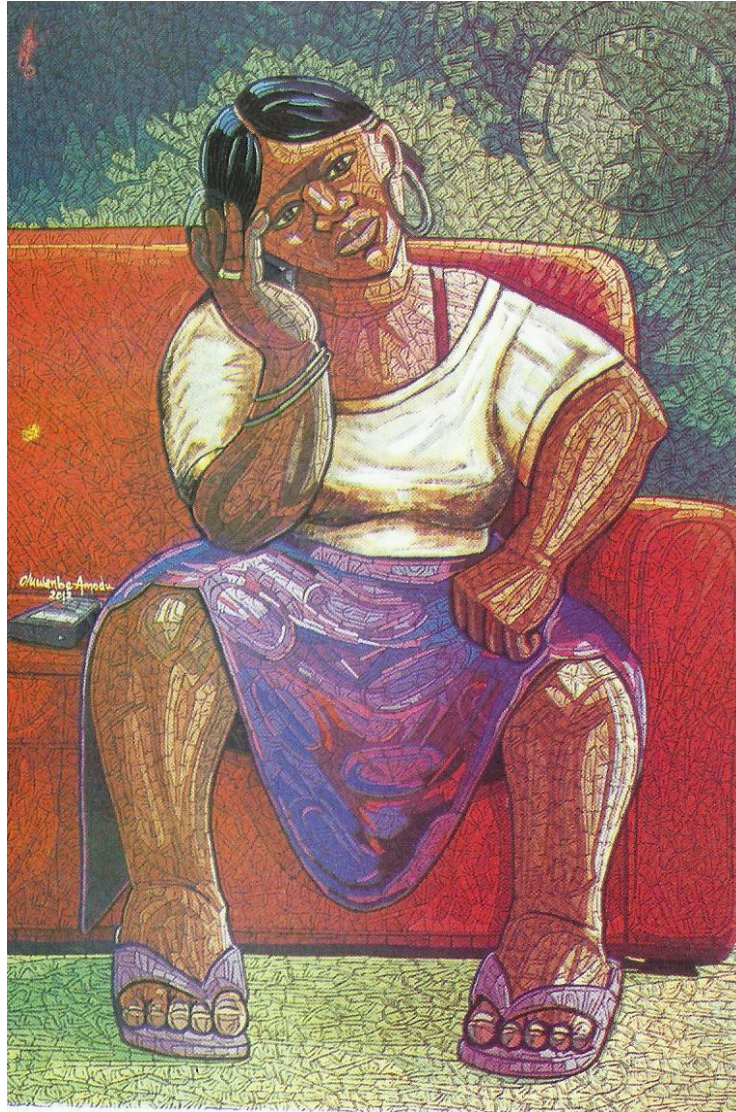


Fig. 132: *Waiting*, Oluwambe Amodu, mixed media, 100 cm × 70 cm, 2012.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

Amodu deploys associatives to capture pungent issues, using the market as an economic metaphor. He finds the market woman a convenient mold to cast allusion on life. He uses *Eroja*, Ingredients (Fig. 133) as an associative to remark on life. He composes the painting with a female figure and baskets of tomatoes. Sitting with a

penetrating gaze, her gaze betraying her long waiting, the figure sets out to sell foodstuffs in the store. There is no doubt that the display of the foodstuffs shows bumper harvest, which translates to much supply. However, there is no buyer thereby creating inelastic demand. He aesthetically creates the female figure in naturalism. She looks into the void, waiting tirelessly for whom to buy her foodstuffs. Contextually, the artist links the tasteful soup to the adequate ingredients and that taste does not come by accident. The soup requires ingredients to come to terms with good taste. The artist associates the taste of the soup with the different levels of life to achieve success.

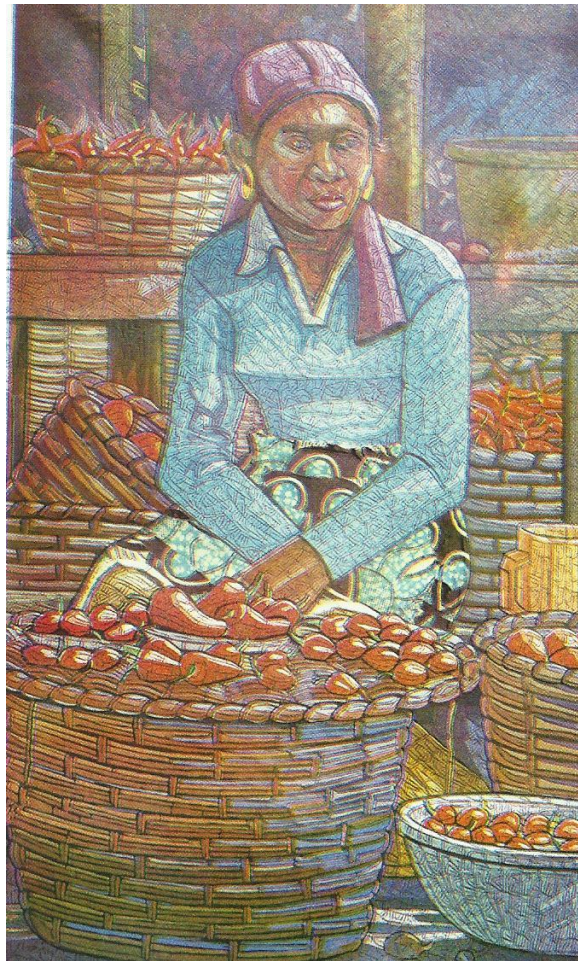


Fig. 133: *Eroja* (Ingredients), Oluwambe Amodu, mixed media, 110 cm × 69 cm, 2012.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

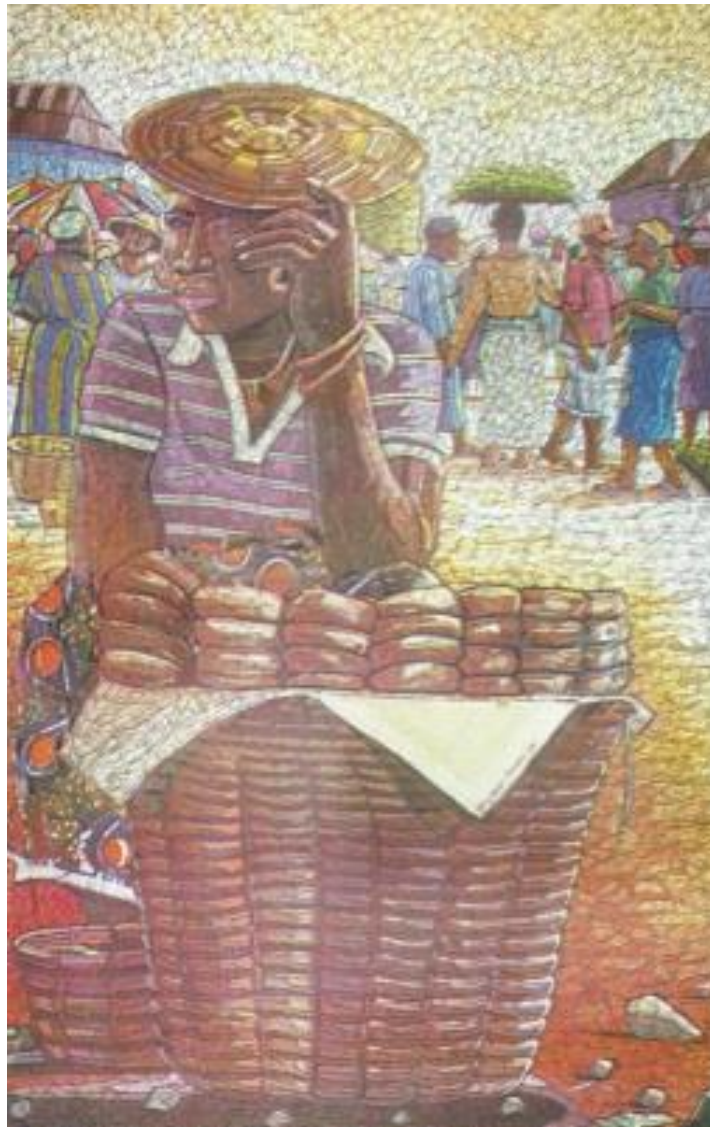


Fig. 134: *Labe Oorun Yii* (The Scotching Sun), Oluwambe Amodu, mixed media, 100 cm × 61 cm, 2012.
© Oluwambe Amodu.

In the pursuit of the use of associatives, Amodu still finds the market woman a convenient mold to cast allusion on life experiences. He uses *Labe Oorun Yii, The Scotching Sun* (Fig. 134) as an associative to make a strong statement on life experiences. He composes the painting with a female figure selling foodstuffs in the store. She seats behind her basket of fish. At the background, a crowd of market people gathers for different activities. He aesthetically creates the female figure in naturalism. She shields

herself from the sun with a tray and looks into the void, waiting tirelessly for whom to buy her foodstuffs. Contextually, the artist captures the perseverance of the market woman in the face of the scorching sun. In a country where many policies are mere blueprint in the drawing board and die naturally there, many people must worry and complain. In the light of this, Amodu uses *Labe Oorun Yii* to entreat the viewers to jettison complaints and embrace doggedness, which is the soul of existence.

Babatunde Saliu Jimoh



Babatunde S. Jimoh, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Babatunde Jimoh, an ardent *Ara* disciple, who was born on August 15, 1985, hails from Kogi State. He attended United High School, Ikorodu, Lagos. He had informal

training in art in Jonix Studio for two years. He obtained National Diploma in General Art, Federal Polytechnic, Auchi, in 2008. He has participated in many group art exhibitions. In an interview, Babatunde Jimoh reveals the depth and drive in his art practice that in the ñcocoon of meditation, the sweetness of Artò (*Ara* art) gave him joy. He added, ñWith my Art (*Ara* art), I am never aloneð.⁸ This assertion is very lucid in his works. He seems to draw his inspiration from nature. Indeed, he proves that nature is a wide ambience of art through the varied subjects in nature that he articulates through art. Babatunde's paintings address the human subject in relation to culture. Stylistic study of his Araism paintings reveals that he is a colourist. Thematically, he finds cultural beauty an interesting subject. Very remarkably, his master has greatly influenced him in colour, composition and cultural themes. His style and theme of beauty are very revealing in *Apparel of Beauty* (Fig. 135), which captures virtuousness.

He composes this painting as a female portrait, paying attention to correctness of anatomy and colour. He also explores the hues and value of colours in the service of forms. The portrait meanders between realism and stylization. The emphasis on colour and movement suggested by the beads is communicative. Jimoh aesthetically articulates the figure and the canvas to intersect in a romance with straps of colour, lines and dots that plunge the painting into rhythmic flow. The movement of the beads, earrings and hair convey the theme of royalty and wealth in a symphony that echoes the rhythmic flow in the painting. Thematically, Jimoh in his *Apparel of Beauty* depicts African sense of beauty. Very ornamental, indeed, the portrait embodies physical beauty. Implicitly, the artist draws a line between physical beauty and cultural or innate beauty. He reveals that

a virtuous woman is acceptable in a society than one who is physically beautiful but lacks moral.

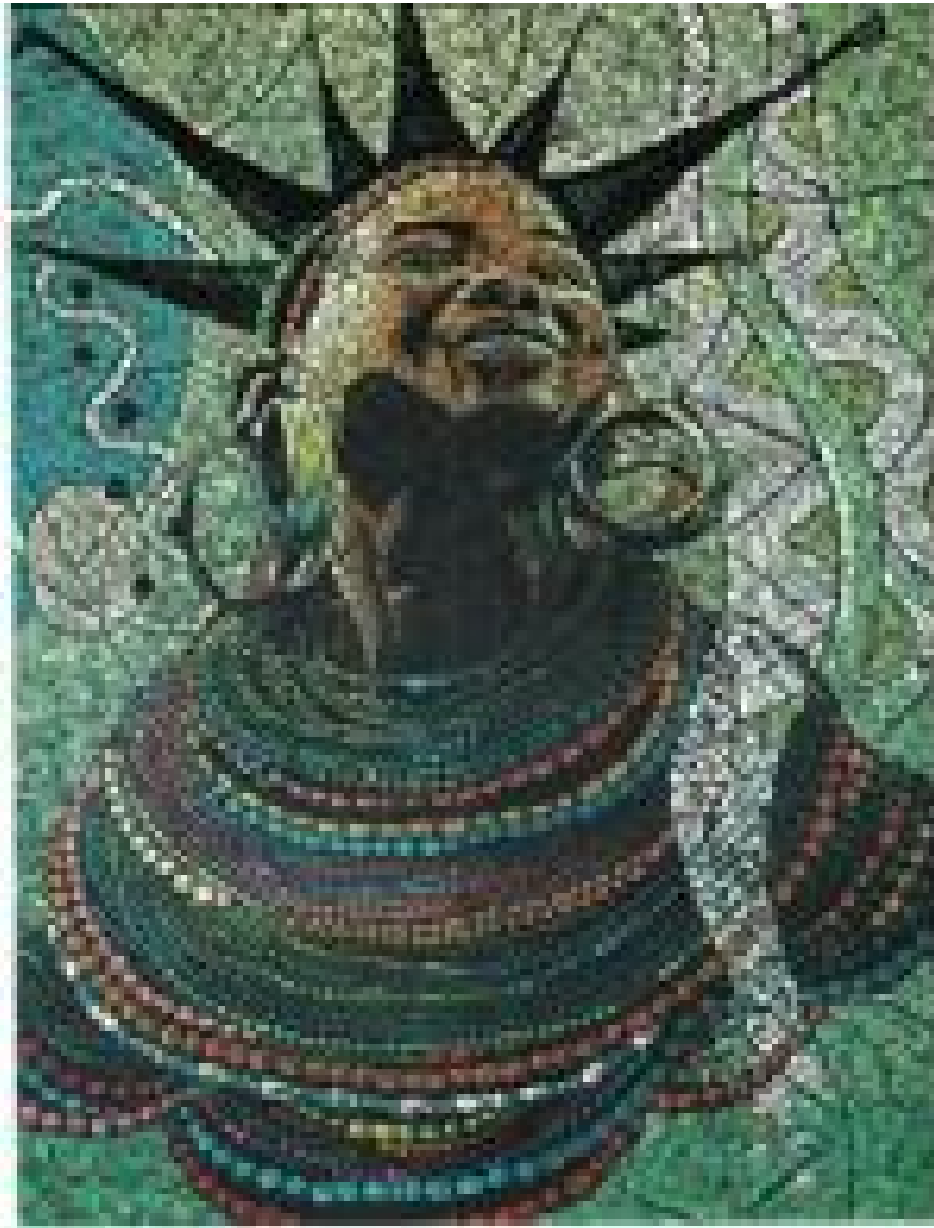


Fig. 135: *Apparel of Beauty*, Babatunde Jimoh, acrylic on canvas, 60 cm × 49 cm, 2010.
© Babatunde Jimoh.

Costume appeals to Jimoh's artistic ingenuity. The artist is at home with it. Many of his works, including *African Look* (Fig. 136) portray competence in the articulation of

costume and anatomical correctness. The work further captures African beauty, using a female figure in a heavily ornamented portrait. The lady in the portrait has a stern look, which serves to define physical beautiful that lacks moral, much uncultured. The artist here also pays attention to correctness of anatomy and colour, exploring African costume in rhythmic impact.



Fig. 136: *African Look*, Babatunde Jimoh, acrylic on canvas, 79 cm × 60 cm, 2010.
© Babatunde Jimoh.

The emphasis on colour and movement as the beads show is communicative. The figure in *African Look* and the canvas intersect in a romance of floral design, hues of

green, linear and dotting expression that plunge the painting into a rhythmic density of textures. The entire costume echoes royalty and wealth in the service of beauty. Thematically, *African Look*, as the legend reveals, is African beauty. Through the painting, the artist avowed to beauty as contextual, achieving success for colour application, rhythm and mastery between technical intent and execution.



Fig. 137: *Amnesty*, Babatunde Jimoh, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 76 cm, 2010.
© Babatunde Jimoh.

The artist also captures the theme of unrest in the Niger-Delta in his works. Some of his works such as *Amnesty* (Fig. 137) are devoted to militia. *Amnesty* articulates unrest and government's efforts to deal with it, using the portrait of late President Yar'Adua as a model of amnesty from government. The painting also shows symbolic costumes of war and militants. Aesthetically, Jimoh uses the motifs and colour in the service of expressive

forms. Compositionally, the artist juxtaposes portraiture with scenery design to portray denunciation of arms and ammunition because of amnesty. The artist cleverly produces the painting in three sections: domineering portrait of late President Yar'Adua, the scenery of a crowd watching and that of silhouette of figures surrounding their arms and ammunitions. The artist articulates the forms in yellowish green, suggesting natural vegetation and a sense of hope and progress. Contextually, Jimoh uses *Amnesty* to deploy forms and colour in the service of history to inform and remind society of amnesty granted to militants in the Niger-Delta by late President Yar'Adua's government. The painting commends the government for the foresight to grant amnesty. Overall, *Amnesty* successfully displays correct colour application, rhythm and mastery.

Jimoh takes interest in environment, revealing the peculiarity of places through art. In this vein, his experience in his polytechnic days in Auchi is very revealing in his paintings. An outdoor painting, *Life in Auchi* (Fig. 138), depicts hardship associated with domestic water. He composes the painting with human figure fetching water from a drum with which he collected rainwater. Aesthetically, the forms demonstrate mastery of correctness of anatomy, depending heavily on hues of red, green and blue. Jimoh articulates his forms on yellowish green foreground, which he complements with a background of straps of red and yellowish green. Contextually, *Life in Auchi* makes a strong comment on the difficulty of water in Auchi. The environment is dry, hilly and stony. Pipe borne water is not available in the area. The artist through his painting draws government attention to the necessity of water and other social amenities.



Fig. 138: *Life in Auchi*, Bab Jimoh, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 75 cm, 2008.
© Babatunde Jimoh.

In his critical attitude to environment, Jimoh also reflects the sense of continuum in the human race. He believes that procreation is a necessity and then enjoins humanity to multiply. *Cherished Pride* (Fig. 139) portrays children as pride to parents and the society. The artist compositionally produces a mother bathing her child in an outdoor painting. A master of anatomical study, the artist articulates the images naturally using African motifs. He explores the convenience of colour straps as canvas that depends largely on linear texture. Thematically, *Cherished Pride* comments strongly on the importance of childbearing to keep marriage in African setting. He observes that many

young immature and unmarried girls are getting pregnant and giving birth to children indiscriminately. He contends that children of this category have turned to armed robbers and kidnappers thereby constituting evil in the society. He believes that many children from legally married parents are cultured and have shown a sense of discipline in the society. Drawing a line between the two categories of the children, the artist believes, as Africans, that a disciplined child is a source of fulfillment in marriage. A mother, therefore, ought to devote herself to the upkeep of her children. Jimoh then uses *Cherished Pride* as a parenthood metaphor in the crusade for a better society.



Fig. 139: *Cherished Pride*, Bab Jimoh, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 75 cm, 2008.
© Babatunde Jimoh.

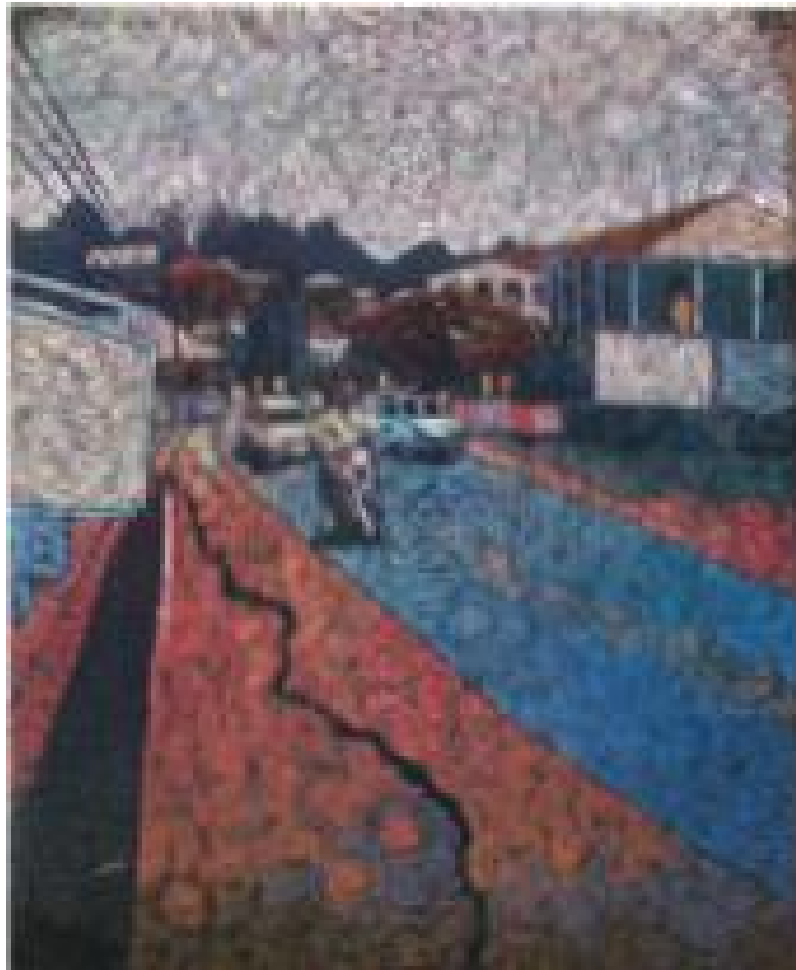


Fig. 140: *Survival*, Babatunde Jimoh, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2008.
© Babatunde Jimoh.

Survival (Fig. 140), another of Jimoh's painting, depicts transport system. He articulates the forms in a landscape that depends largely on aerial perspective, depicting motorbike as means of transportation. Using houses and vegetation on a rocky land, the artist visualizes vehicles and motorbike carrying passengers on tarred road. The artist picks details such as electricity lines and gutter by the side of the road. He clearly separates the foreground from the background, using vegetation and houses. He achieved success in this painting with the correct use of hues colour to reveal their intensity. Contextually, *Survival* comments on the poor state of the economy of the country. The

artist derides the inability of government to provide for its citizens thereby there forcing them to indulge in anything to survive, which include motorbike transportation that he condemns.

From the selected works above, Babatunde Jimoh is a social critic who uses his *Ara* art as a social barometer. With his art, Babatunde Jimoh measures the moral temperature of his society, determines the nature and degree of the moral illness and prescribes the moral drug. Indeed, he has successfully engaged art in the service of his society.

Esther Ayodeji Fakunle



Esther A. E. Fakunle, 2009.
© Mufu Onifade.

The first female *Ara* disciple, Esther Ayodeji Fakunle, was born on March 19, 1986, in Ibadan. She is an indigene of Oyo State. She attended Rainbow Kindergarten,

Fulton County, Georgia, U S A; Moroe Elementary School, Clayton County, Georgia, USA; Riverdale Middle and High School, Riverdale, Georgia, USA and University of Technology Secondary School, Akure, Ondo State. She obtained her first degree in Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, in 2009. In 2010, she got married to Fakunle. She has attended a number of art exhibitions. In an interview, Mrs. Fakunle reveals, "Looking beyond the horizon (to see *Ara*) reveals the true identity of artistic expression".⁹

Fakunle's *Ara* art is laced with "true identity of artistic expression". With identity, she creates an individual style in Araism. Stylistically, her works are sharply divided into two: formative period and maturity period. In her formative years, which begins from 2008 and ends in 2010, her works are characterized with some elements of ineptitude. Indeed, when Fakunle joined Araism and debuted in the exhibition of Araism Movement 3 two things would have influenced her art. She grew up in the United States of America where she had her primary school education and Folk Art could have influenced how she expressed her figures and her art as a whole. Again, in this period, she was in junior levels as a student of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. Therefore, she was still grappling with mastery of forms and sense of colour judgment. Her works (Figs. 141 -146) that she produced in the formative period reveal this attributes. In 2011 she took sometime off duty to study harder to usher in the maturity period. In 2012, she bounced back with artistic fire in her bones and since then her works experience a kind of alienation that is characterized with painstaking, correctness of anatomical expression and compact rhythmic flow of composition and colour judgment. Her works (Figs. 147 ï 151) clearly reveal a strong mark of professionalism, establishing

her individual art style as the *spilling canvas*, the floodgate of artistic fire. Indeed, with her recent paintings, study shows that the mantle of her art master has dropped heavily on her. Though her mentor treats his canvas differently and holds the palette knife in different angles, he has influenced her well enough in colour, composition and cultural theme. She now commands expressive language, exploring its ductility as symbolic visual forms in African motifs.



Fig. 141: *Sleeping on Duty*, E. Fakunle, acrylic on canvass, 90 cm x 70 cm, 2008.
© Esther Fakunle.

Sleeping on Duty (Fig. 141), which she produced during the formative period, reflects commerce. Compositionally, the artist produces a seating female figure with

baskets of articles for sale. She aesthetically laces the painting in realism. The foreground in yellowish green contrasts the background with hues of red and blue in circles. Her right hand penetrates into space while the left enfolds space. Contextually, Fakunle in her *Sleeping on Duty* depicts state of the economy, using a supplier who had no buyer. Indeed, there is supply but no demand and because of this the supplier is sleeping when she ought to be transacting business.

Fakunle takes interest in her immediate environment, using cultural dance to make a statement on her society. *Our Cultural Dance* (Fig. 142), another work of the formative period, reflects dance as an expression of the intangible culture of her people. Compositionally, the artist uses a dancing female figure heavily clad in costume on a canvas of yellowish green, which is separated by a spiral strap of deep blue. Aesthetically, the artist articulates the figure in contraposto. The artist embellishes the painting with daubing style. This is to keep faith with physically dabbing liquid kaolin by the people when involved in cultural dance. Though the artist produces the painting in realism, the anatomy is proportionally faulty. The transition of forms is smooth. However, the figure is not totally part of the painting since the figure and the canvas can be separated neatly. The wavy strap of blue is foreign to the painting. Contextually, Fakunle, in her *Our Cultural Dance*, depicts culture, using dance and costume as channels of expression. The artist deploys dance and costume symbolically to reveal an aspect of the thinking of a people. In the pursuit of the dissemination of the prestige of a people, Fakunle uses *Our Cultural Dance* to preserve the fashion and dancing steps of an age. Especially with the advent of Christianity and Western form of civilization, which

erode the indigenous tradition, the relevance of *Our Cultural Dance* to Africa cannot be overemphasized.

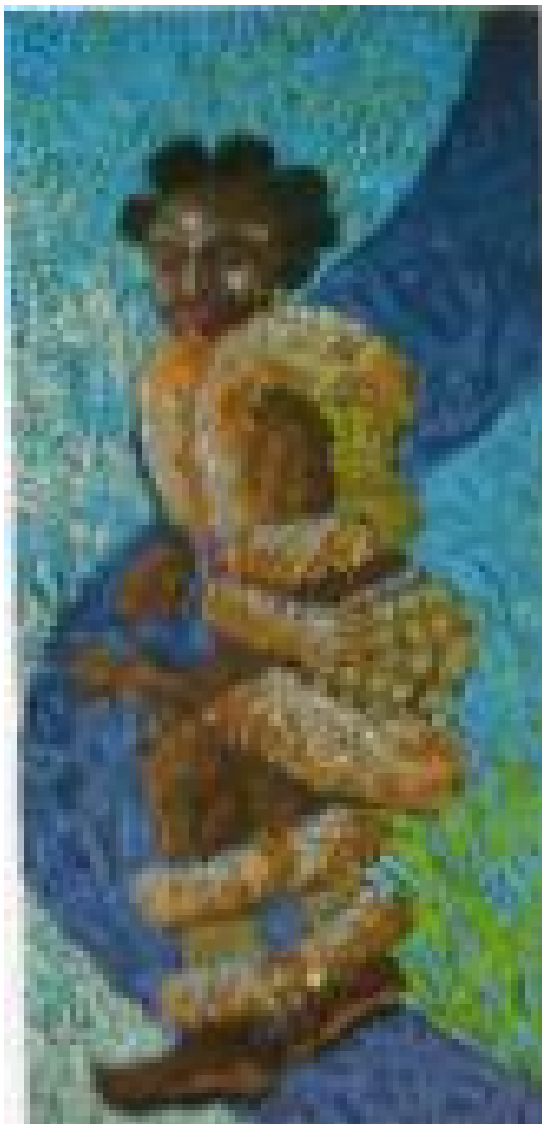


Fig. 142: *Our Cultural Dance*, Esther Fakunle, acrylic on canvass, 90 cm x 45 cm, 2008.
© Esther Fakunle.

Most times, art reflects oneself. Some women artists have engaged art in the service of women, seeking and propagating gender equality. Some women artist use art to

discourage women from immorality as a source of income. These women artists are committed to encouraging the women to embrace the dignity of labour. Fakunle is such woman artist that uses her art to encourage the dignity of labour among women.



Fig. 143: *Ise Loogun Ise*, E. Fakunle, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 60 cm, 2010.
© Esther Fakunle.

Her *Ise Loogun Ise* (Fig. 143), also of the formative period, captures women at work. She composes the painting with three figures at work and three large fruits. Aesthetically, the figures are stylized, showing exaggerated forms, which put the painting into folk art. The artist achieves depth with sizes of the figures, but the large fruits above and the patch of dark green behind them are compositionally poor. However, the painting

is harmonious. Thematically, Fakunle uses her *Ise Loogun Ise* to portray dignity of labour, using women at work as motifs. Indeed, she encourages the women folk through this painting to work hard to assist their husbands.

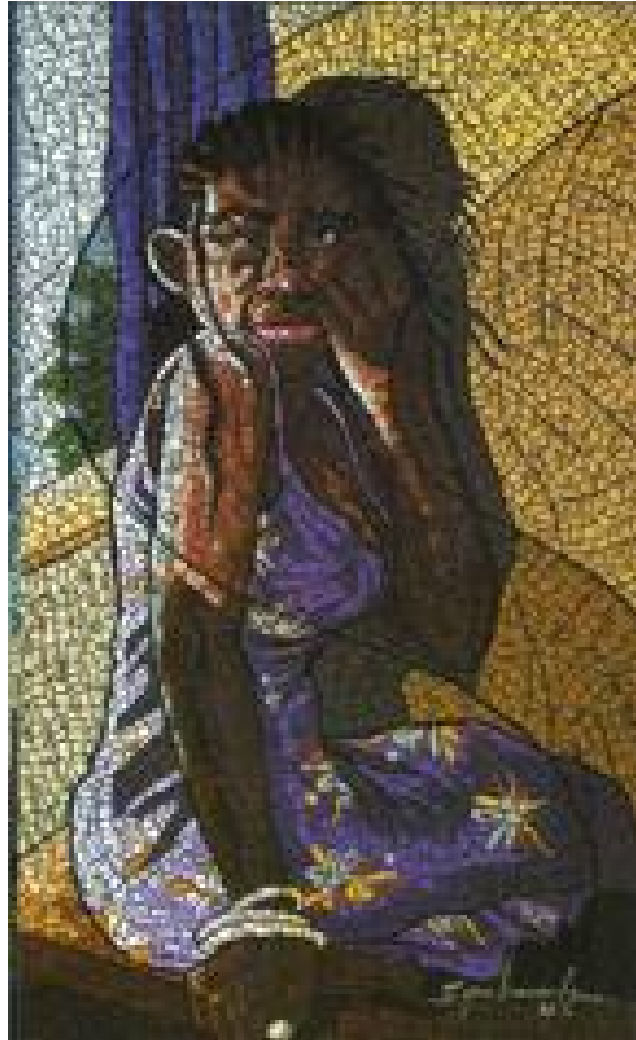


Fig. 144: *Koro Isin*, Esther Fakunle, acrylic on canvass, 77 cm x 46 cm, 2010.
© Esther Fakunle.

Another work that marks the formative period is *Koro Isin* (Fig. 144), which unequivocally reiterates black beauty as it relates to Africans, using a woman figure that is as dark as the seed of *Koro Isin*. The indoor painting is composed with a female figure seating on a chair in a pensive mood. A realistic painting, it achieves aesthetics by

expressing the minor forms on the face in deep shadows, but with smooth transition. The right arm on which the figure seems to rest on has clearly defined sections with smooth transition. The bangles on the hand introduce circular movement. The bangles and their underlying structure break the angular movement of the left arm and her torso in relation to her legs. The lines and colour straps on the canvas add to the rhythmic flow of the figure.

Thematically, *Koro Isin* depicts African beauty, affirming Guinness's tacit advert of Stout, "Black is Beauty". She uses the painting to allude to the seed called *koro isin* in Yoruba, which is very black and beautiful to behold. No doubt, the work portrays Fakunle as an artist who has a deep sense of her culture and whose mother tongue has become a veritable tool in her art practice. The clear understanding of her culture has enriched her Africanism painting by supplying depth of visual language and characterization of events and phenomena.

Fakunle may be comical but her messages and style of expression have serious implication on society. *Sleeping on Duty* (Fig. 145), a work of the formative period, visually comments on the Nigerian economy. She composes the outdoor painting with a seated female figure and fish displayed for sale in a market scene. Aesthetically, the painting reconciles the figures and objects and the entire canvas in symphony so much, so that the subject and canvas are inseparable. The artist uses colour shades and lines to lead the beholder to other smaller and less vivid objects in the market. The lines and colour straps on the canvas add to the rhythmic flow of the figure. Thematically, Fakunle in her *Sleeping on Duty* portrays the state of the commercial aspect of the Nigerian economy. She reveals clearly that there is supply but no demand. The figure, which ought to be

busy selling, sleeps because there are no buyers, a signifier of poor economy. Prices of commodities are rising in a galloping inflation. Both supply and demand suffer. In fact, the scene the artist painted reveals that buyers were totally absent from the market.



Fig. 145: *Sleeping on Duty*, E. Fakunle, acrylic on canvass, 92 cm x 62 cm, 2010.
© Esther Fakunle.

The artist's interest in her cultural environment is very high. This is why many of her works comment on culture but in varying styles. *Agbor Ibo Dance* (Fig. 146) also portrays dance as an expression of the culture of her people. This work of her formative years is composed with dancing human figures, all in the rigorous poses of dance drama.

Aesthetically, the artist produces the figures in realism, with emphasis on one figure while others are less vivid. This work marks her improvement in the mastery of forms and ability to marry technicalities with communication of themes. Contextually, *Agbor Ibo Dance* depicts merrymaking, exposing the other side of a country in distress. It reveals that though the people suffer they sometimes smile, therefore, agreeing with the late musician, Fela Anikulapo Kuti's song, "Suffering and Smiling".⁷

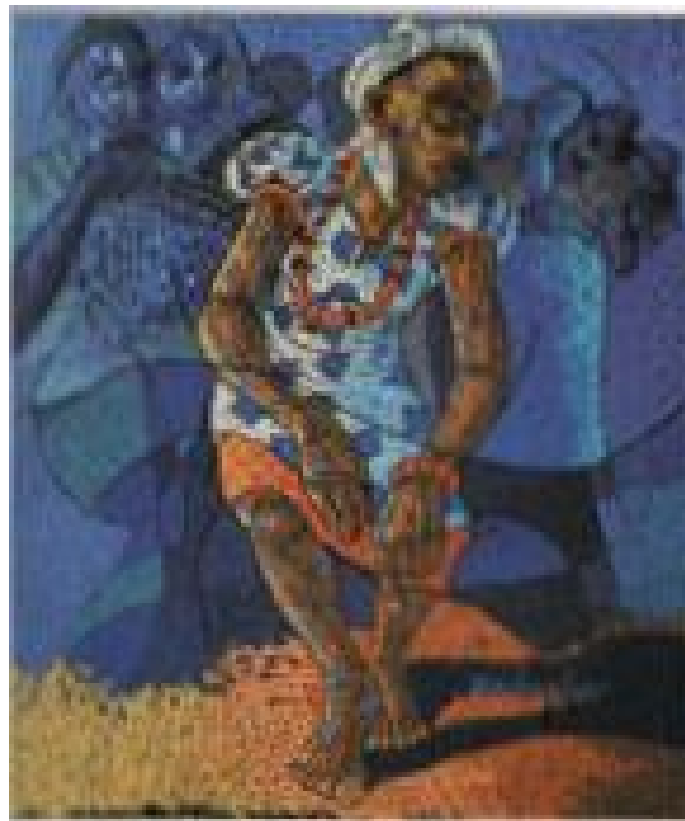


Fig. 146: *Agbor Ibo Dance*, E. Fakunle; acrylic on canvass, 93 cm x 76 cm, 2010.
© Esther Fakunle.

Breaking away in 2012 from the characteristics of her works in the formative period, Fakunle began to hatch artistically meticulous and incisive paintings, which plunge her in a class of the mentor. Many of her works such as *Sleeping on Duty* (Fig. 147), show this dexterity while revealing the poor economic experiences of the people.

Compositionally, the artist produces a market scene of two figures, fruits and their stand. Aesthetically, the forms are in realism, giving attention to correctness of their anatomy.

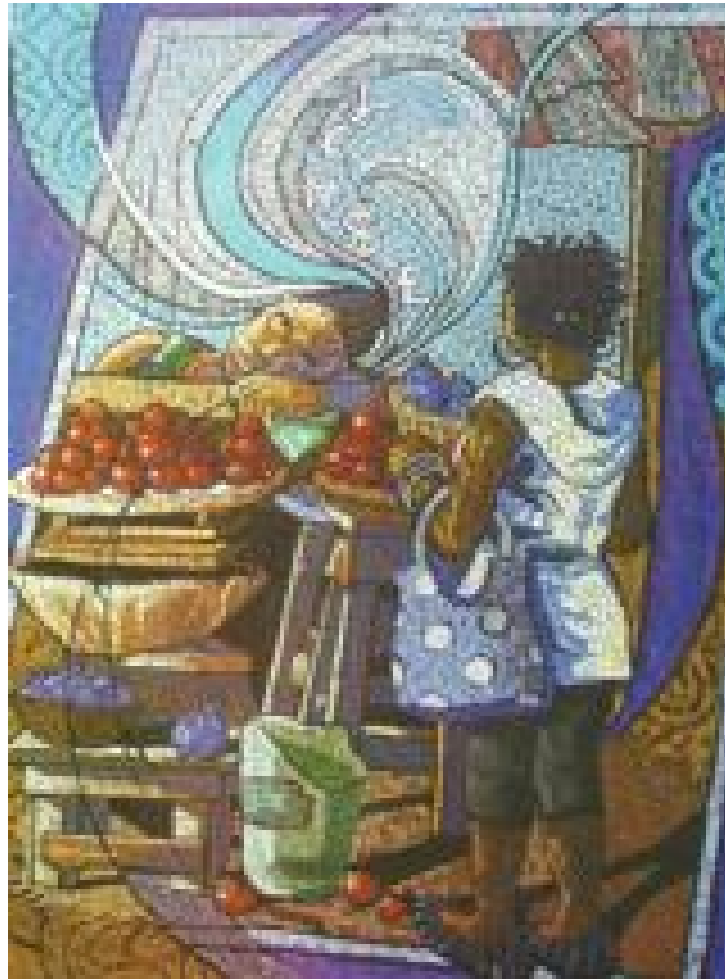


Fig. 147: *Sleeping on Duty*, E. Fakunle; mixed media, 90 cm x 120 cm, 2012.
© Esther Fakunle.

Contextually, *Sleeping on Duty* is poor trading. The seller sleeps on her article. Her dreams of naira, dollar and pounds are represented in colour straps and symbols that emanate from her head. Buyers are long expected. The buyer who came in later is making effort to wake her. The fruits on the tables, the ones that fell on the ground, the tables and other objects are expressed realistically that one will be tempted to pick some. The whole painting is woven round with lines, sharing two canvases with an evidence of one

flowing into another. Here, Fakunle makes the first declaration to have an individual style in Araism: the *spilling canvas*, the floodgate of artistic fire.



Fig. 148: *Trade by Barter*, E. Fakunle, mixed media, 70 cm x 100 cm, 2012.
© Esther Fakunle.

In the pursuit of economic theme and in keeping faith with the new evolving style, the artist turns out *Trade by Barter* (Fig. 148), which also captures the theme of economy. The outdoor painting composed with two children of secondary school age who are hawking oranges and banana. The forms aesthetically in realism, makes the oranges and banana very real and attractive to a point that an observer will want to pick some. She wove the whole painting together with expressive lines and colour hues to

achieve balance and rhythm, still maintaining double canvases in one with an evidence of one flowing into another. She treats the painting with what is now a familiar artistic style but different in colour scheme. Figs. 147 and 148 exist in the same artistic wavelength of naturalism. The forms transit smoothly with very clear sections. Thematically, *Trade by Barter* portrays poor economy, which has led to child abuse. Here, the artist condemns child abuse and warns parents and government about it. Giving her background as one who started education very early in life in the United States of America, Fakunle believes that child abuse is wrong and that it must be addressed.

Fakunle married in 2010 and some of her experiences, to this effect, began in 2012 to appear in some of her *Ara* paintings. *Igbeyawo*, Marriage (Fig. 149) which depicts traditional marriage is one of the works that capture such experiences. Using African symbols and motifs in a well articulated manner, the painting shows mastery of forms and colour management. With a composed figure of a veiled bride awaiting the groom, the forms are harmonized with a canvas of straps of colour hues to achieve unity and coherence. Indeed, both the image and canvas are inseparable in the density of texture. Aesthetically, the artist produces the forms in realism, which transit smoothly with identifiable sections. However, underlying structure is draped mechanically. The drapery does not obey the force of cannery folds. It is flat. Nonetheless, the colour straps in different hues and values and linear effect of the painting reinvigorate the subject. Contextually, *Igbeyawo* seeks to preserve traditional institution, using the motifs of traditional marriage as a means. In this vein, the artist condemns childbearing outside marriage, believing that childbearing in the confines of marriage is honourable, decent and dignifying.



Fig. 149: *Igbeyawo* (Marriage), E. Fakunle, mixed media, 55 cm x 75 cm, 2012.
© Esther Fakunle.

Expectation (Fig. 150) articulates childbearing, using comic forms in African motifs and symbolization. Though comic, yet the message is strong. The figure appears double, a technique that portrays transition. Aesthetically, the artist uses colour hues in straps, exploring their intensity for artistic mastery. Thematically, *Expectation* makes a strong comment on childbearing, reechoing *Igbeyawo*'s message.



Fig. 150: *Expectation*, Esther Fakunle, mixed media, 55 cm x 75 cm, 2012.
© Esther Fakunle.

The marriage experiences of Fakunle enrich her works, including *Transit* (Fig. 151), which aptly captures some development in her marriage. She stylizes the female figures, elongating the forms for emphasis and aesthetics. The main female figure is almost full size, highly stylized and elongated while others show only their bust. However, the jewelry on the main figure seems to hang from the underlying structure mechanically, not obeying the movement of the underlying structure. The artist uses linear effect and value of colour to achieve success. Contextually, *Transit* reflects pregnancy, fulfilling the expectation of the new couple.



Fig. 151: *Transit*, Esther Fakunle, mixed media, 60 cm x 90 cm, 2012.
© Esther Fakunle.

George Egunjobi



George Egunjobi, 2010.
© Mufu Onifade.

George Egunjobi, an indigene of Fiditi in Oyo State, was born on July 30, 1984 in Lagos. He had his primary school education in African Church Primary School from 1989-1994 in Ifako-Agege, Lagos. He attended African Church Grammar School, Ifako-Agege, Lagos (2001) and Living Stone Computer School, Ogba, Lagos (2001). He later studied painting in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. He has also participated in many group art exhibitions. In an interview, George Egunjobi reveals, "Art is all about creativity, but authentic art (*Ara* art) is all about originality."¹⁰

The young artist seems to understand early some of the principles of life. This attribute shows in many of his *Ara* art paintings, which are symbolic and spiritually compact. Thematically, Egunjobi addresses issues of the supernatural, showing clearly the inability of man to control himself and his environment. His art seems to conclude that since man is incapable he should devote himself to the supernatural in order to influence his environment. It is edifying to discover a young man of Egunjobi's age in a university environment to begin to confront issues of the state of man. Overall, George Egunjobi is yet to stick to an individual style. However, chronological study of his *Ara* paintings shows two divisions. The first division is the use of flat colours and the second is about blending of colours.

Consequently, his idea of originality of art and conviction of life seem to sum up in *Adura Nii Gba*, Power of Prayer (Fig. 153) which captures a man in prayer. The painting is composed with a man in prayer session. This painting, which is aesthetically naturalistic, uses forms that are not vivid. He daubs the figure rather than detailing it. The formal characters are graphical. Hues are distinct, transition, sections of forms are lacking and the drapery is mechanically structured not to yield to the underlying structure. The canvas has no relationship in colour with the figures it contains. The originality of the painting is in the manner of treatment. Contextually, Egunjobi articulates religion with *Adura Nii Gba*, drawing man's attention to the need to pray with emphasis on the rosary. With the rosary, he seems to establish the commonality between Christianity and Islam, arguing that the common use explains one God to all as the supernatural being.



Fig. 153: *Adura Nii Gba* (Power of Prayer), George Egunjobi, acrylic on canvass, 84 cm x 84 cm, 2008.
© George Egunjobi.

Eja NbAka? Positive or Negative? (Fig. 154) reechoes the theme of religion, but questions man's manner of involvement in it. He composes the painting with a seating male figure that uses the rosary in a saucer. On formal structure, Egunjobi introduces an element of colour blending. The background is flat, using some linear effect in an arch form, which is against the foreground that is involved in a little colour blending of hues of purple. The blending is more in the images. Thematically, *Eja NbAka?* depicts religion, showing some confusion associated with it. Man has interpreted and approached religion in different ways. To some, it is an instrument of peace or a springboard to riches. However, to others, it is an instrument of suppression thereby giving rise to crisis.



Fig. 154: *Eja NbAka? (Positive or Negative?)*, George Egunjobi, acrylic on canvass, 93 cm x 46 cm, 2008.
© George Egunjobi.

Aajo, Journey (Fig. 155) summarizes the world as a journey through the earth. The artist composes it with camels of burden and human beings on a long road. Here, the artist returns to his graphical painting where he does not blend colours. However, the colour combination actually reflects his intension of an evening journey. On themes, Egunjobi uses *Aajo* visually to comment on the state of man on earth as one just passing by. He seems to say that this world is not ñour ownò and that man has a home somewhere.

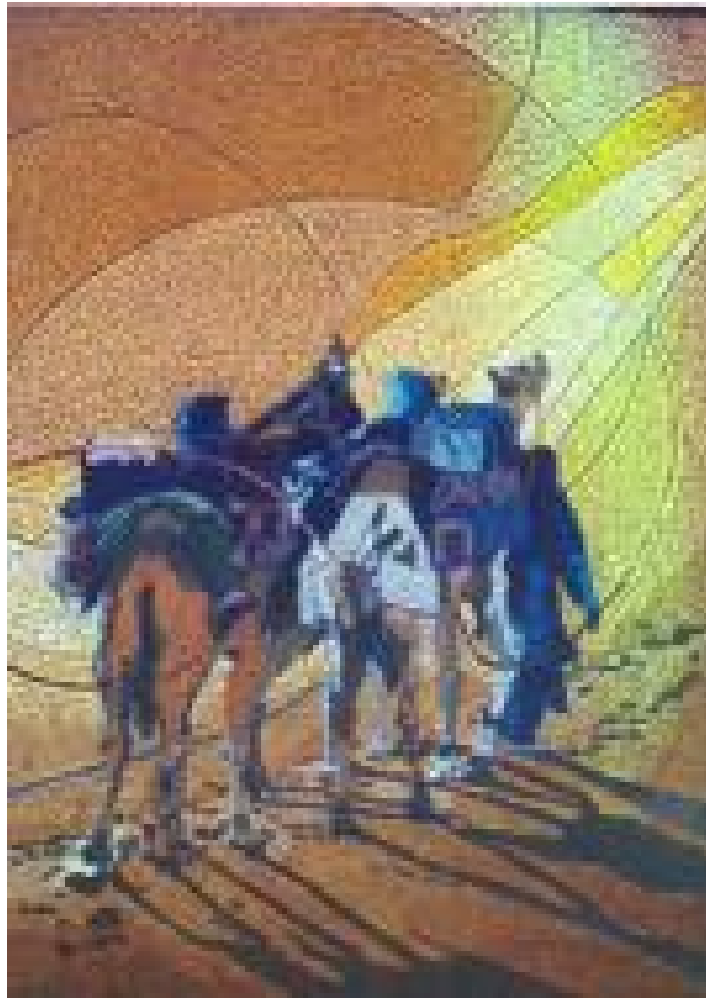


Fig. 155: *Ajo* (Journey), G. Egunjobi, acrylic on canvass, 116 cm x 84 cm, 2008.
© George Egunjobi.

The artist comments strongly on other subjects apart from religion. *Fulani Regalia* (Fig. 156) captures culture. The painting makes a bold statement on northern tradition, using Fulani traditional costume as motif. The portrait of a Fulani girl in a frontal pose is aesthetically articulated to reveal femininity. The painting is completely free from flat colours to allow strongly unite the canvas with the image. All the parts of the image transits smoothly in hues, tone and value. This same transition also occurs strongly between the image and the canvas. In the parlance of thematic, *Fulani Regalia*

seeks to preserve culture, using the traditional dressing code. In this same vein, the artist condemns obnoxious dressing associated with the youth who claim that it is a mark of civilization.

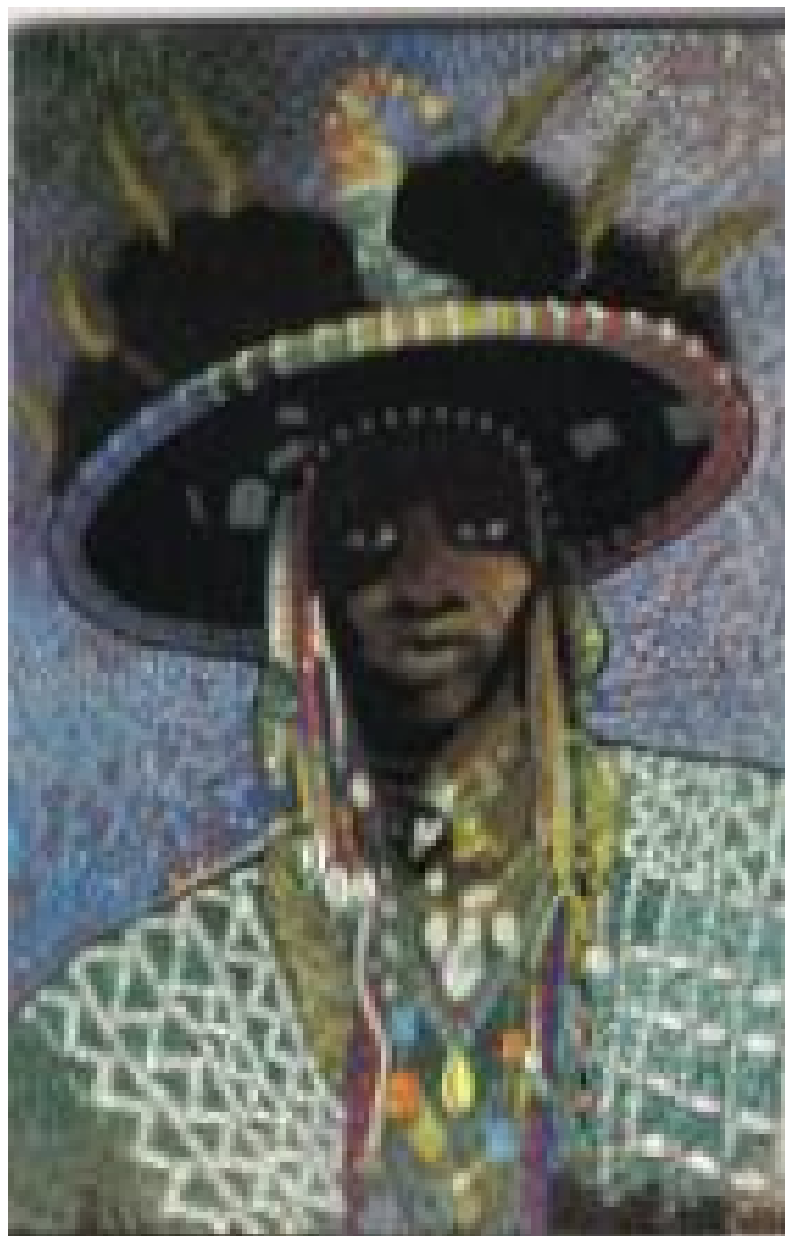
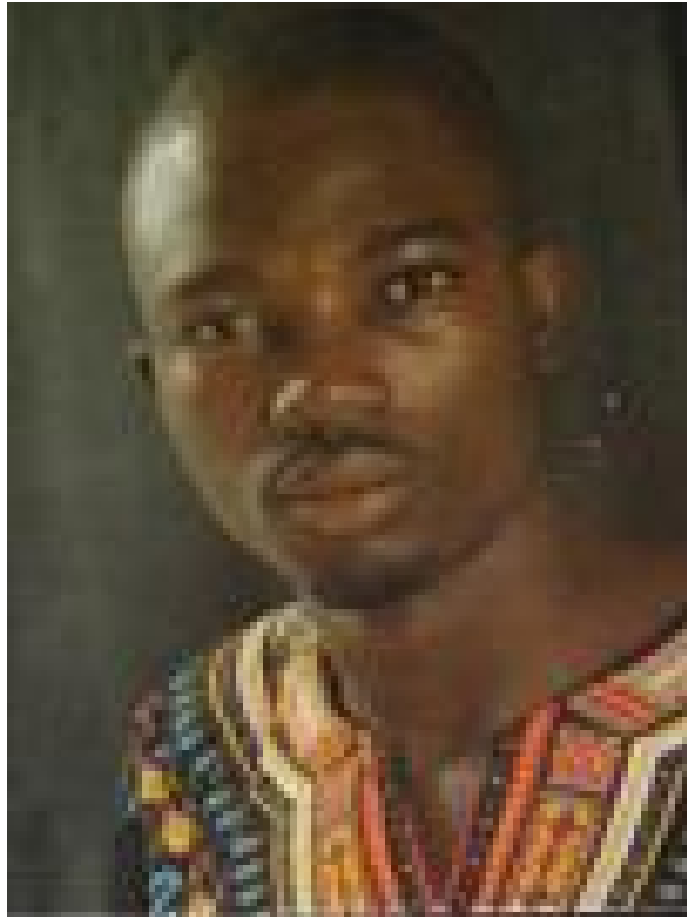


Fig. 156: *Fulani Regalia*, G. Egunjobi, acrylic on canvass, 76 cm x 51 cm, 2010.
© George Egunjobi.

Steve O. Oni

Steve O. Oni, 2009.
© Mufu Onifade.

Stephen Olamide Oni was born on May 18, 1985. He is a native of Osun State. He obtained a B A, Fine and Applied Arts, in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, under Obafemi Awolowo University where he was the president of students association of the department. Steve Oni has two solo and many group art exhibitions. He won the first price in United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) competitions held in Abuja in 2005. Steve Oni is a fellow of the Academy of Realistic Painting, Toronto, Canada. He is a member of Araism Movement and the Zero Art Group, Lagos. He made his first appearance in Araism Movement exhibition in 2008. The stylistic study of his

works reveals that his paintings have mosaic effect. For convenience, therefore, his style is graphical-mosaic. The thematic feel of his paintings embraces nationality and culture.



Fig. 157: *Positive Thinking*, Steve Oni, acrylic on canvass, 91 cm x 61 cm, 2008.
© Steve Oni.

The style and themes sum up in *Positive Thinking* (Fig. 157) which articulates a map of Nigeria with a human head at the middle. The head is recognizably the portrait of Former Head of State, General Ibrahim Babaginda. In spite of the seemingly mosaic effect, the forms are vivid and resemblance is very strong. The sections and transitions are clear. The painting has a unique way of blending the edges of the hues yet the effect of daubed colours are there. Though the painting lacks depth and therefore very flat, it achieves success with appropriate application of colour value. The deep green surrounding helps to hold the interior in a compactness of unity and coherence. Contextually, Oni uses *Positive Thinking* to capture leadership laced with meanings

during the Babangida regime when some sections of the country were agitating for secession. Here, Oni asked for national unity.



Fig. 158: *Pride of an African Woman*, S. Oni, acrylic on canvass, 91 cm x 61 cm, 2008.
© Steve Oni.

Oni captures the prestige of African women with his art. His *Pride of an African Woman* (Fig. 158) records the traditional African dress code, using two women plaiting hair as model. The artist composes the outdoor painting with two female figures plaiting hair, using African symbols and motifs in a graphic-mosaic style that depicts mastery of forms and application of colour hues and intensity. Aesthetically, Oni produces the

painting in realism with forms that are vivid on a background of circles of varying intensity of green. The artist achieves balance, proportion and line quality with clear sections and transitions that make the painting a success. *Pride of an African Woman* reveals the cultural reverence of traditional hair styling by woman. It prefers hair plaiting to the hairdo in salon.



Fig. 159: *Loju Amokoko* (Potter's Wish), S. Oni, acrylic on canvass, 91 cm x 61 cm, 2008
©Steve Oni/2008

Another of Oni's painting in this genre, is *Loju Amokoko*, Potter's Wish (Fig. 159) that articulates a potter at work. He composes the outdoor painting with a human figure preparing green wears for an open-air firing. The painting in realism shows a high sense of proportion and depth created with aerial perspective. Thematically, *Loju Amokoko* depicts the artist as a contributor to the economy and national income. The artist further reveals his support for traditional method of firing, showing the success achieved with it.

Adeyeye Taiwo

Adeyeye Taiwo, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Born in Ibadan on August 24, 1979, Adeyeye Taiwo is an Osun State indigene. He had his primary and secondary school education in Ibadan. He studied Fine Arts in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, and graduated in 2008. He has taught Fine Arts at primary and secondary schools. Influenced by Globade Omidiran, he develops interest in prints and card design. He has many group art exhibitions. In an interview, Adeyeye Taiwo divulges, "My mission is to be an Apostle of peace, using my art (*Ara*) as a

veritable tool to pull down walls of hate and build bridges of love (through *Ara* art). Art is life; without art, existence is valueless.¹¹ The artist is a man of few words but his words are laced with much meaning. His *Ara* art actually summarizes his person. His assertion runs through all his paintings, including *Child's Play* (Fig. 160) where he portrays a free world, using the model of children playing.



Fig. 160: *Child's Play*, Adeyeye Taiwo, acrylic on canvass, 100 cm x 66 cm, 2008.
© Adeyeye Taiwo.

He composes the painting in realism with scenery of children playing outdoors in moonlight. The painting is aesthetically produced with the hues of cool and warm colour.

The painting uses a circle of highlight in which two children play harmoniously. The third child who is bigger and perhaps older is playing and looking at others. Aesthetically, the artist creates depth with perspective and achieves a high sense of proportion, balance, value and rhythm. The light green vegetation makes a crack on the circular strap of the deep green as contrast to the hues of red within the circle. Contextually, Taiwo, in *Child's Play*, depicts a free world that is free of hate and crime. However, with the crack and the bigger child outside the wall, the artist insinuates trouble creeping in as children grow into adulthood.



Fig. 161: *Aajo Ni Mo Wa*, Adeyeye Taiwo, acrylic on canvass, 81 cm x 61 cm, 2008.
© Adeyeye Taiwo.

Aajo Ni Mo Wa (Fig. 161), another of his painting, captures womanhood, using a woman who straps her children. Aesthetically, he creates the forms, which are blurred on a canvas of yellowish green vegetation in realism. At the center of the canvas is a large strap of highlight, which separates the foreground from the background. The artist articulates the painting by blending the hues to give the feel of unity and coherence of forms and canvas. Thematically, Taiwo represents the condition of many mothers in a deprived economy. The artist reveals that the woman does her duty without complain. She takes care of family believing that it is the bedrock of the society and that if the family fails society fails.

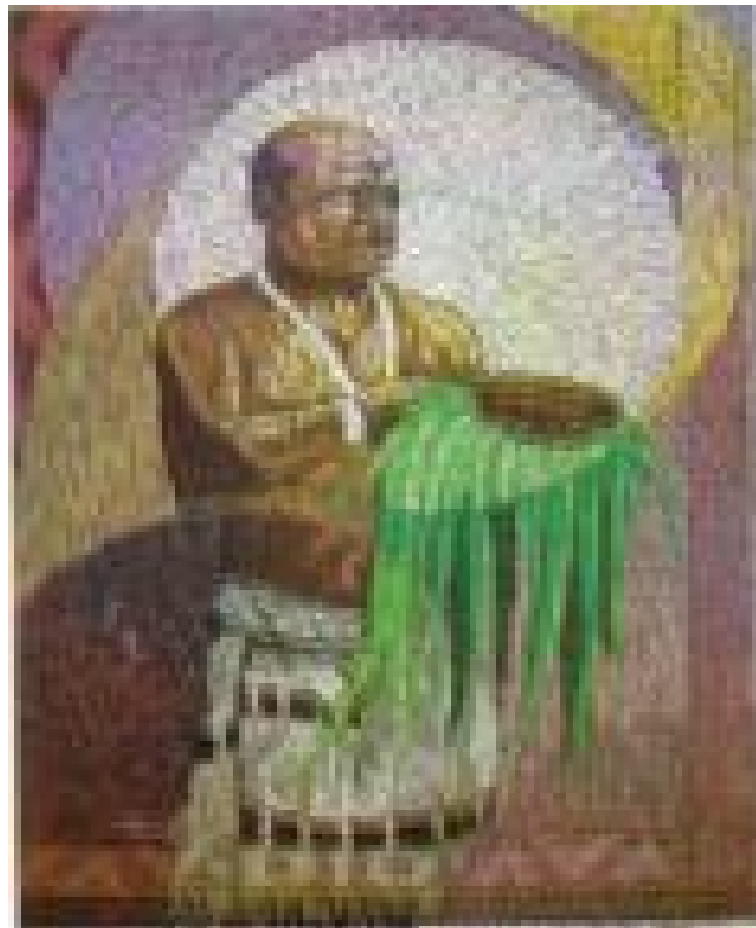


Fig. 162: *The Priest*, Adeyeye Taiwo, acrylic on canvass, 81 cm x 61 cm, 2008.
© Adeyeye Taiwo.

Another of his painting, *The Priest* (Fig. 162) echoes peace through religion. Taiwo calls for peace, using a priest preaching as a model. Compositionally, the artist articulates the painting aesthetically by rendering the forms and canvas in circles of hues for highlight. Overall, peace to the society forms the drive with which Taiwo produces this painting. The artist has witnessed much killing and destruction of property, which has slowed down the pace of progress.

Kesa Babatunde



Kesa Babatunde, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Kesa Babatunde is an indigene of Ago Iwoye, but was born on January 20, 1987, in Lagos. He attended Ajenifuja Primary School, Ilupeju from 1992 to 1998. Thereafter, he started his secondary school education at Ilupeju College, Lagos, from 1999 to 2001

but completed it at United High School, Ikorodu, Lagos. He studied Printing and Graphics Design at the Government Technical College, Ikorodu from 2004 to 2007. He woke up to serious art during his Industrial Training in Jonix Studio in 2006. He has some group art exhibitions. In an interview, Kesa Babatunde discloses, ñArt (*Ara* art) is spiritual; the spirit of art is pure and wholesome. Let us embrace the spirit of Art in our culture to influence change in our society.ò¹²



Fig. 163: *Ewa* (Beauty), Kesa Babatunde, acrylic on canvass, 75 cm x 60 cm, 2008.
© Kesa Babatunde.

The study of Babatunde's paintings such as *Ewa*, Beauty (Fig. 163) actually shows the drive for positive change in society. It depicts true beauty that is innate rather

than physical beauty without moral. *Ewa*, Beauty is a female portrait, which is so distinct that it can easily be separated from the canvas. What probably connect the two are the two lines that run from her shoulders to the canvas. The artist aesthetically creates the human forms in realism. Babatunde renders the crown and the beads in such away that they add to the rhythm. The wrapper has some folds that add movement to the angular flow of the hands. Contextually, *Ewa*, Beauty reflects innate beauty, which it believes is cultural and virtuous.

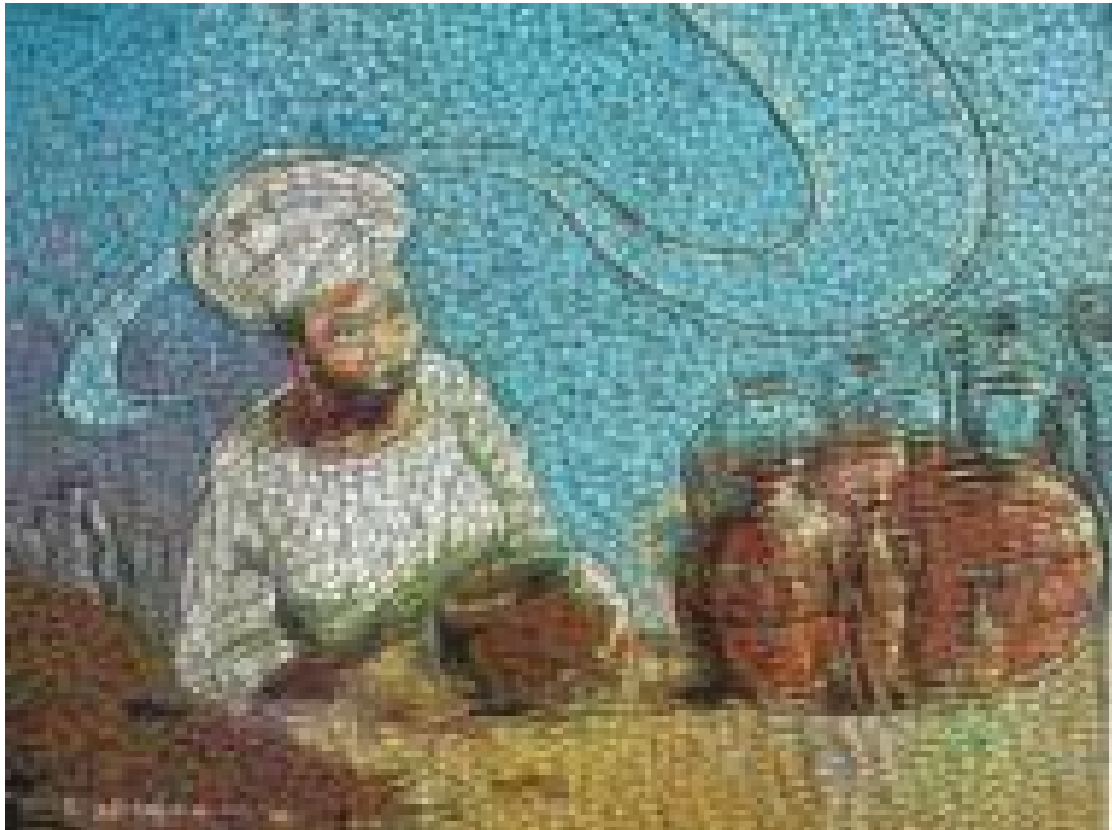


Fig. 164: *Amo* (Clay), Kesa Babatunde, acrylic on canvass, 75 cm x 60 cm, 2008.
© Kesa Babatunde.

Amo, Clay (Fig. 164) captures the artist, using the female figure of a potter at work. The painting in realism, shows green wares on a background that is flat. The artist connects the image and canvas properly with a spiral strap. The pots show some depth as

the ones in front are bigger and more vivid than the ones behind. However, the image and objects have little claim to detailing of forms. Thematically, *Amo* depicts industrialization through craft. The artist believes that women in Nigeria contribute to Gross National Product.

Traditional festivals are ambience of the visual arts. Traditional festivals provide the pictorial and plastic arts with the benefit of performance of verbal art, supplying the dramatic poses, costumes and imageries of songs, folklore and tales. Indeed, they provide a complete insight into the worldview and art form of a people. Kesa Babatunde takes advantage of Eyo traditional festival and articulates *O O Odeko, O O Meyo* (Fig. 165). It conveys culture, using a masquerade as a motif of excellence. In an outdoor composition, the artist articulates a mini bus and the popular *Eyo* masquerade in performance. This painting marks the beginning of the artist unifying images with canvas in his art practice. He applies hues of colour, which he blends to achieve harmony, rhythm and unity. The stick in the painting that runs from the top right corner to the left below further unites the elements. Even the miniature bus, which its colour scheme is almost different from the canvas, is blended carefully with the figure.

Thematically, *O O Odeko, O O Meyo* is an expression of culture. The masquerade is a spirit medium through which the spirits communicate with the people. The artist believes that spirits and ancestors are integral part of the people and that they have control on the living. He revealed that man demonstrates his attachment to the world of spirits and ancestors further by consulting them and making sacrifices to appease them. Stressing the importance of masquerades, the artist revealed that the masquerades in ecstasy and trance assume the status of the spirit and communicate hidden knowledge to

man. The painting is successful with a show of mastery of forms, technical intent and execution.

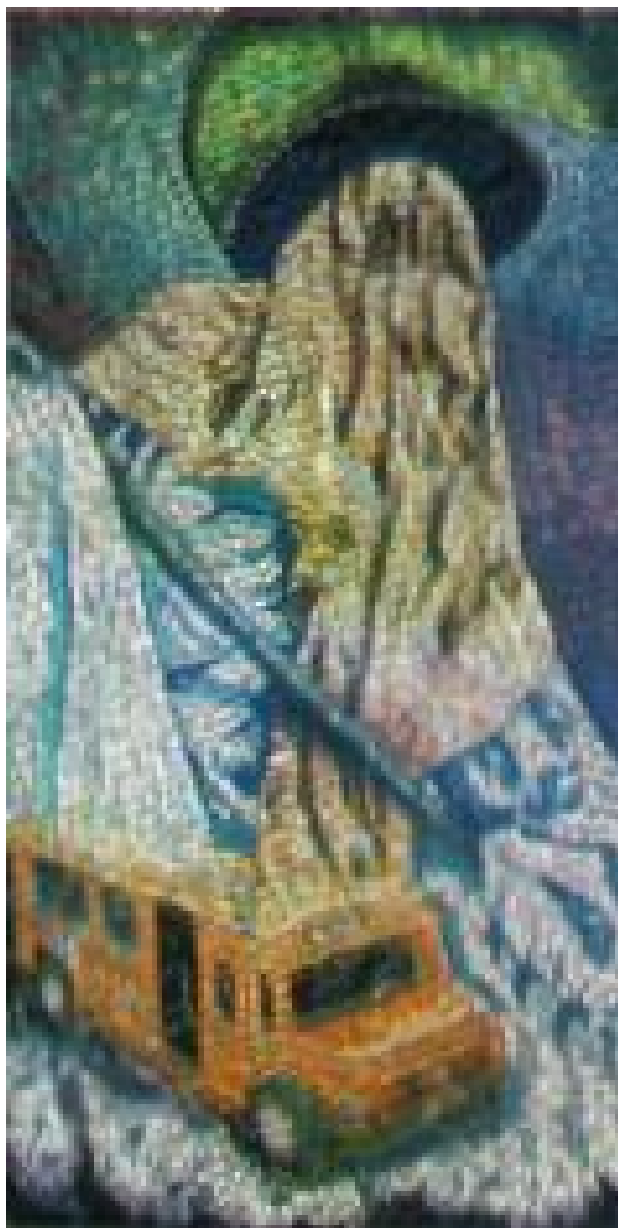


Fig. 165: *O O Odeko, O O Meyo*, Kesa Babatunde, acrylic on canvass, 90 cm x 45 cm, 2008.
© Kesa Babatunde.

The artist talks to the society sometimes ironically. Many artists use the visual arts as allegory in the dialectics of human history. Indeed, many artists, including Kesa

Babatunde, have engaged the visual arts as watchdog to society. He engages *The Great Observer 1* (Fig. 166) to talk to the world ironically, using human observers and players as celestial models. The scenery composition shows a strong mark of depth established by aerial and volumetric perspective. The artist aesthetically articulates the foreground with hues of warm colour and makes it to fade into thick vegetation. He renders the human figures with high skill of artistry. Contextually, *The Great Observer 1* depicts how the supernatural beings watching over man and his activities. The artist believes that man is not hidden from the supernatural beings and enjoins man that only virtue would do.

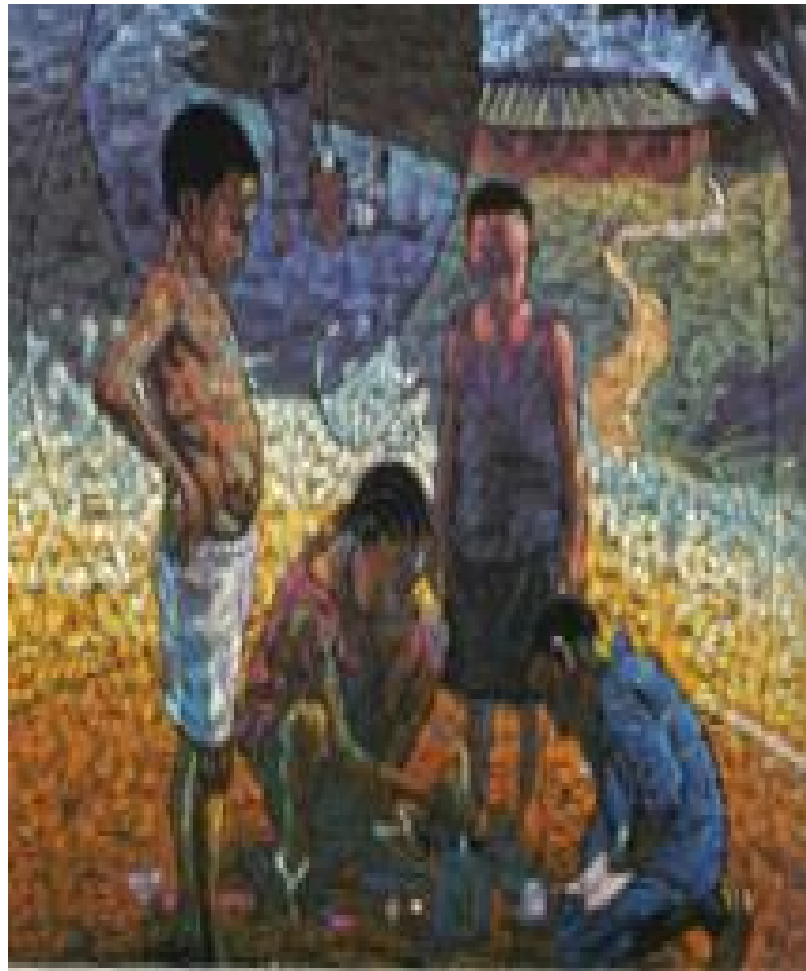


Fig. 166: *The Great Observer 1*, Kesa Babatunde, acrylic on canvass, 76 cm x 61 cm, 2010.
© Kesa Babatunde.

Babatunde picks interest in athletes, believing that man should sometimes take some time off duty to exercise. *Polo* (Fig. 167) reflects sports. Showing high sense of aesthetics, the artist creates the foreground in yellowish green and the background in reddish purple vegetation, uniting the two with reddish purple horses on the foreground. The patches of reddish purple on the foreground reemphasize the unity and coherence that tie the entire painting together. The artist applies colour hues that he blends to achieve harmony, rhythm and unity. The artist achieves depth with aerial and volumetric perspective. Thematically, Babatunde uses *Polo* portray sports as unifying factor in the society. He believes that sports helps man to keep fit.



Fig. 167: *Polo*, Kesa Babatunde, acrylic on canvass, 76 cm x 76 cm, 2010.
© Kesa Babatunde.

Another of his painting, *Alarede*, Bride (Fig. 168) captures traditional institution, using a bride who awaits her groom to symbolize traditional marriage. Babatunde rendered the female portrait in realism, emphasizing the traditional costume in African symbolism. Aesthetically, the artist working in realistic mode clearly shows mastery of forms. The image strikes strong unity and coherence with the canvas both in colour value and in linear effect. The shying pose of the bride is very real. The proportion, balance, rhythm, light and shade in the painting strongly reveal artistic excellence and clear reasoning.



Fig. 168: *Alarede* (Bride), K. Babatunde, acrylic on canvass, 76 cm x 46 cm, 2010.
© Kesa Babatunde.

Contextually, Babtunde uses *Alarede* visually to appeal to the society to preserve marriage institution, believing that the family is the society itself. He believes that united and peaceful families in turn make up a united and peaceful society. Above all, marriage, he reveals, is God's ordained institution and that it must be treated with sanctity. The young Babatunde must be revered for his wisdom revealed in thematic parlance as seen in his paintings. Though he is yet to have an individual style, his master's influence on him on colour and thematic views is great.

Bolarinwa Akinlabayaki



Bola Olowolabayaki, 2007
© Mufu Onifade.

Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki was born on June 4, 1975, in Lagos. He is an indigene of Ondo State. He attended Kajola Primary School, Olodi-Apapa, Lagos; Federal Government College, Ojota, Lagos. He studied Fine and Applied Arts (NCE) in Federal

College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Lagos. He studied Fine and Applied Arts in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has participated in many group art exhibitions. In an interview, he reveals, ñI have learnt to treasure my talent and express it in a unique way that will lead to an expression of the greatest within me.ò¹³ The study of Olowolabayaki's paintings such as *Pride of a Race* (Fig. 169) actually reveals his talent, style and thematic feel .



Fig. 169: *Pride of a Race*, B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 125 cm x 92 cm, 2008.
© Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

These attributes are very clear in his outdoor composition, *Pride of a Race*. The painting is a composition of cattle, which show the forms in clear sections and transition in a background that gives the feeling of a burning bush. He casts the images in a highlight of yellowish green surrounded by deep green with which he suggests some element of depth. The painting depicts the economic identity of a race, the northern part of the country. However, the level of the boy and that of the cattle, lack depth and show a technical error.



Fig. 170: *Isokan*, B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 123 cm x 77 cm, 2008.
© Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

Olowolabayaki also addresses cultural identity and aesthetics with his realistic paintings. *Isokan* (Fig. 170) portrays cultural pride, appreciating African symbols and motifs in the compactness of forms and colour. *Isokan* explores expressive lines and colour value in a composition of dancers in flowing *agbada* on a background of a web of flora design. The images are in dramatic pose showing the rigour of the dance and drumbeat with dominating hues of blue on both the figures and foreground. Contextually,

Isokan depicts the prestige of a people; using cultural dance to preserve and disseminate the worldview of the Yoruba race. The drumbeat supported by masaras is communicative and inspiring. In historical and commemorative idiom, the talking drum speaks straight from the unadulterated tradition and deciphered traditionally by trained ears. In this mode, it inspires such rhythmic dance steps among the people.



Fig. 171: *Omi Tuntun*, B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 61 cm x 61 cm, 2010.
©Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

The artist, who speaks straight from tradition, is sometimes philosophical. *Omi Tuntun* (Fig. 171) captures his new beginning, which Araisim brought to him. The artist is at home in philosophical dialectics with his use of the calabash dropping water to

symbolize Araism emitting new phase of artistic idiom in his life. The images have little reference to their source yet they communicate effectively in composition and colour. Compositionally, the artist uses two calabashes boxed up in a linear and flora background. He straps the objects together stylistically with hue of brown as overlapping spiral band. Aesthetically, the artist explores expressive lines, strap and border to coordinate the message in a coherent and rhythmic flow. Thematically, *Omi Tuntun* talks about Araism. The artist believes that Araism has brought new artistic language to project the prestige of a people and in this; it has become a household name. In the same stratum, Araism has brought new artistic and economic energy to his life.

Another of his painting, *Awo* (Fig. 172) addresses life as it relates to keeping secret. The artist composes the painting with human figures converging together to whisper. Draped like Bini Chiefs in flowing wrapper and singlet, the figures hold hands while putting heads together in a circle of hues of white and red for highlight. Lizards also circle the human figures. The border serving as wall is articulated with patches of deep hues of blue as cracks in the wall. With the drive for aesthetics, the artist renders the figures in realism. Their forms have clear sections and transition. However, the painting is flat with all the lizards having equal size and no depth. Olowolabayaki in *Awo* characterizes a society where nothing can be secret, using the lizards and cracks in the wall as elements of eavesdropping. The artist believes that inability to keep secret in official circle is an official problem.



Fig. 172: *Awo*, B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 77 cm x 51 cm, 2010.
©Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

The artist also addresses commercial issues while appropriating motifs and mode of expression in African symbolism. *Onibara*, Customer (Fig. 173) reflects commerce in the traditional setting. In an outdoor painting, the artist articulates an artisan and his customer in an open studio under a tree. The painting in realism, it aesthetically details only objects but leaves the human figures blurred. Using expressive lines as a web of design, the artist renders the entire painting in lucidity of forms and colour intensity. *Onibara* typifies the relationship between producers and service providers and their customers, believing that the customer is always right. The artist derides lack of trust

between a producer and his customers because of deceit. Therefore, he enjoins producers to be faithful in business.

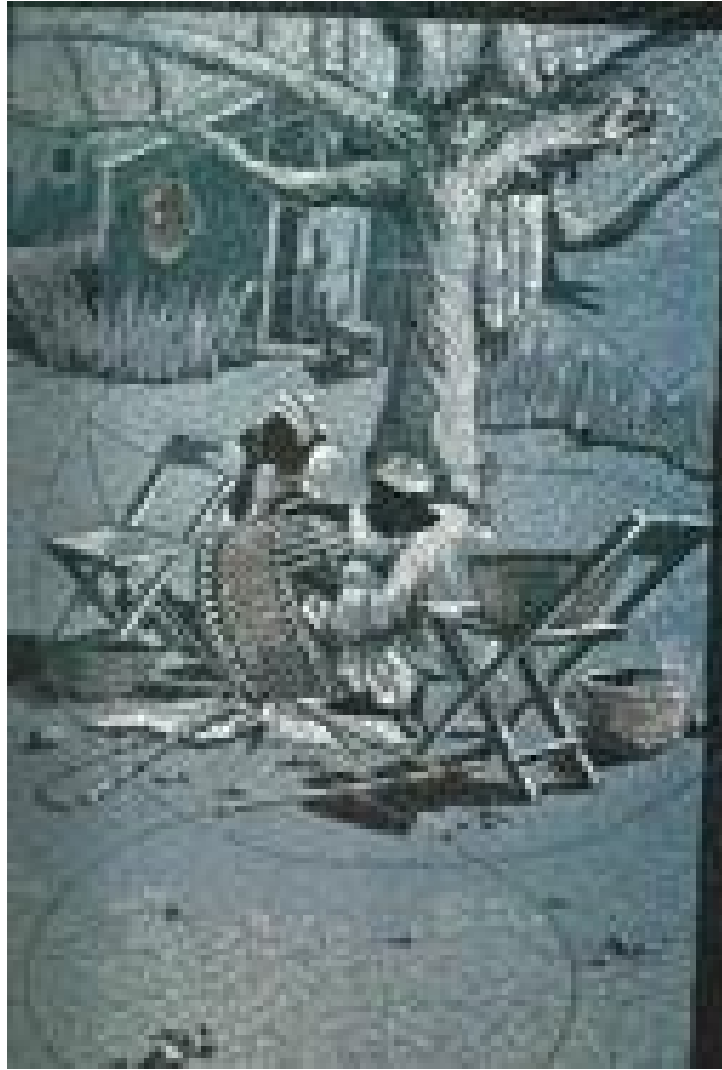


Fig. 173: *Onibara* (Customer), B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 107 cm x 77 cm, 2011.
© Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

Alarede, Legal Bride (Fig. 174) addresses the marriage institution. Highly abstracted, the painting is compositionally in two sections. Section one shows a domineering female portrait with silhouettes of human figure behind her that fade into straps of hues that link her drapery. The other section shows scenery of marriage

ceremony in yellowish green. The crowd is in silhouette strapped off with a green band. The elongated beaded portrait is created aesthetically in a relaxed mood of fulfillment, cooling off the heat of spinsterhood.

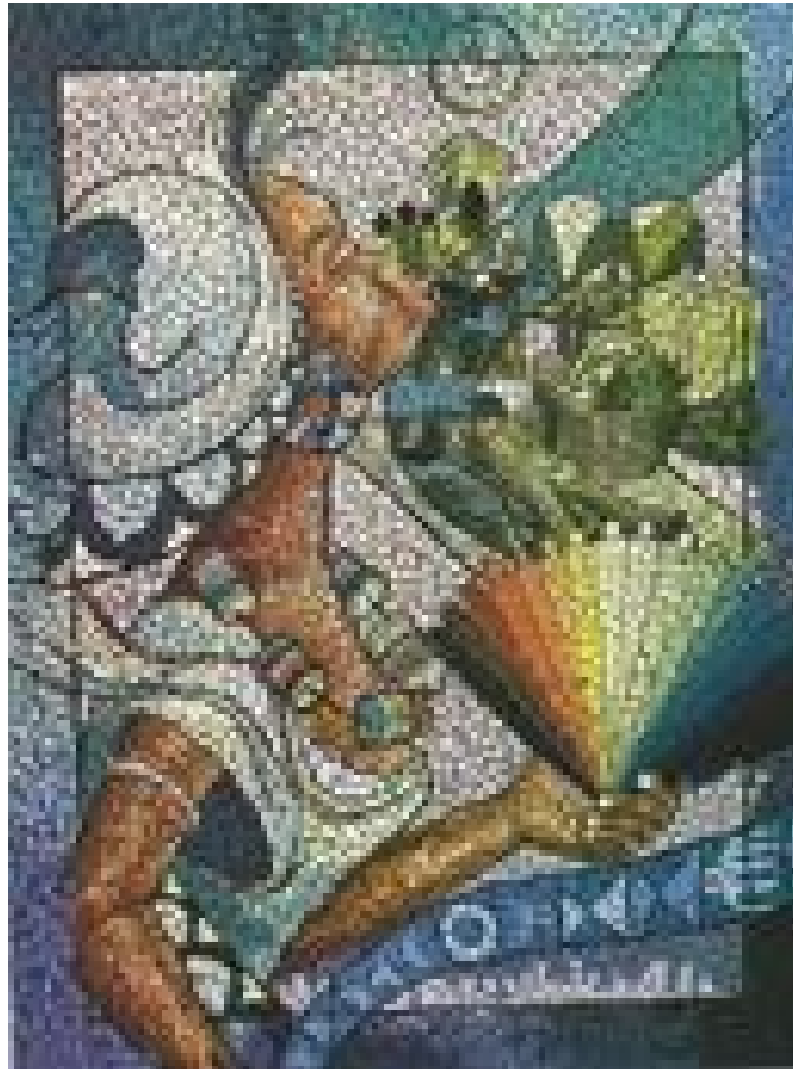


Fig. 174: *Alarede* (Legal Bride), B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 101 cm x 76 cm, 2011.
© Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

The artist renders the painting in two borders; the right hand of the female figure seems to grow out of the second border to penetrate the first. The female figure holds a hand fan from which the crowd seems to grow. A strap of green also takes off from the

hand fan. A strap of blue shoots out from the right hand and goes off down the left vertical border. The movement in the left hand is mechanical as it takes off stiffly and wrongly from the right hand side instead of the left hand side of the figure. *Alarede* seeks to classify types of marriage, revealing that some are legal while others are not. The artist believes that legal marriage fulfils some rites and rituals. He implicitly condemns cohabiting, which lacks the rites and rituals of marriage. He attributes some evil in the society to cohabiting, alleging that children from such experience lack the blessings of legal marriage and then misbehave in the society.



Fig. 175: *Oju Lalakan Fi Nsori* (Vigilance), B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 60 cm x 90 cm, 2012.
©Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

His other painting, *Oju Lalakan Fi Nsori*, Vigilance (Fig. 175) portrays irrationality in society. Compositionally, Olowolabayaki uses the colourist style in a highly abstracted mode. The painting shows the form of a bell in different hues and a crab is just by the corner watching. At the border are different footmarks. An artist with

high sense of aesthetics, he articulates the painting predominantly in hues of primary colours, graduating them to share the attribute of graphics. In this manner, the painting is flat yet it commands the aesthetics to retain attention. Contextually, *Oju Lalakan Fi Nsori* condemns man's irrational behavior, submitting that man's irrationality is the major cause of his problem. He advises man to be patient, to look before leaping, drawing allusion from the crab, which is very vigilant, slow and steady.



Fig. 176: *Ododo*, B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 70 cm x 90 cm, 2012.
© Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

In his concern for humanity, Olowolabayaki crusades for reform through his art. *Ododo* (Fig. 176) captures reform, using the figure of a young decent girl as an epitome

of admiration. A figural composition, the painting was produced in realism with clear forms whose sections and transitions are clear and smooth respectively. The rendition of the forms testifies to the artist's mastery of forms. The well articulated flora background of the painting indicates the artist's high sense of colour judgment and application. Compositionally, the flora expression at the top right angle and left angle at the bottom help to enclose the entire painting in subtle rhythm earlier suggested by the movement of the image, which enfolds space. Thematically, Olowolabayaki condemns immorality in society. He believes that the rate of immorality among young girls is a cause for great concern. Asking for a change, the artist presents *Ododo* as an ideal girl who must be emulated.



Fig. 177: *Ile Labo Simi Oke*, B. Olowolabayaki, acrylic on canvass, 40 cm x 137 cm, 2012.
© Bolarinwa Olowolabayaki.

Thematically, Olowolabayaki's paintings also address economic prestige of the northern part of the country. *Ile Labo Simi Oke* (Fig. 177) articulates the economic identity of the Hausa race, using cattle returning to the ranch as motif. In the vibrancy of colour and architectural rendition, the painting depicts clearly Hausa setting and economic identity. Though the setting and identity are of the north the artist ironically portrays man's journey on earth, believing that man is a sojourner on earth and that one day he must return to the great beyond. Frankly, the mastery of forms, compositional

effect, use of colour values and rhythmic movement to achieve density of thematic and stylistic texture in the painting place Olowolabayaki in the class of artists such as his master. Indeed, his paintings in the study are testimony to the fact that Onifade has influenced him in artistic idiom and correct approach to life, judging his themes and style.

Akinsola Akinwumi



Akinsola Akinwumi, 2007
© Mufu Onifade.

An indigene of Okemesi in Ekiti State, Akinsola Akinwumi was born on February 2, 1980. He attended Adeyemi College of Education Ondo State, where he obtained NCE in Fine and Applied Arts in 2007. He now holds BA (Ed) Fine and Applied Arts, specializing in painting. Akinsola Akinwumi had an early contact with art at Igbinknock

Art Gallery (USA) and later worked as Studio Assistant in his Industrial Training at Homis Art Gallery, Ile Ife in 2004. He is a recipient of the Federal Government Scholarship Award. He has attended many art workshops and conferences and has participated in many group art exhibitions. He is a member of Association of Nigerian authors. In an interview, Akinsola Akinwumi reveals, "Art is like a spirit, which absorbs both mind and soul; this (*Ara* art) has helped to unlock the hidden treasure and reveal unusual happenings".¹⁴ Indeed, Akinwumi reveals hidden treasure and unusual happenings in society through his paintings.



Fig. 178: *Next Two Days*, A. Akinwumi, acrylic on canvass, 76 cm x 51 cm, 2008.
© Akinsola Akinwumi.

Next Two Days (Fig. 178) depicts women who work assiduously to meet economic ends. He composes the painting with human figures at work, weaving mats on a foreground of pieces of broken straw in reddish purple and green as a against a blue

background. The finished mats in hues of blue and red recline on another background, which penetrates the main one. Here, the artist weaves through images in order to bind them in unity, coherence and rhythmic flow, using expressive lines that are sometimes straight, curve or spiral. He achieves depth and emphasis through volumetric perspective and highlight.



Fig. 179: *Put No Asunder*, A. Akinwumi, acrylic on canvass, 61 cm x 61 cm, 2008.
© Akinsola Akinwumi.

The artist sometimes produces works in expressivism, largely using expressive lines for communication. *Put No Asunder* (Fig. 179) uses outlines in a characteristic anthropocentric manner to portray traditional institution. The painting captures a couple in Yoruba attire. Only outlines separate his forms from the canvas and that hues are

necessarily the same. Since it does show forms in light and shade, images appear flat, lacking in depth and volumetric perspective. This treatment is compensated with geometric shapes and articulation of subject. In this painting, the artist makes no mistake in showing clearly the bond between the couple, which fascinatedly tells everyone not to put asunder. The figures vary in size signifying differences in age and experience, but the unity between them is enough warning. Very importantly, Akinwumi reacts to the many cases of divorce in the society in African symbolism, using the dress code of the Yoruba as a familiar motif. The artist indeed condemns divorce.

Jonathan Imafidor



Jonathan Imafidor, 2007
© Mufu Onifade.

A dedicated follower and prolific young artist, Jonathan Imafidor was born in April 26, 1988, at Igara in Akoko-Edo, Edo State. He obtained B.A. Fine and Applied

Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, and graduated First Class. He won First Price (Senior Category), American National Day 2010 Art Competition. Imafidor meticulously expresses his paintings with the illusion of brush effect in the technique of *Araism*, making it difficult for an observer to discern the real tool used. The manner he expresses his images and canvas to share the unity and coherence that many paintings lack coupled with the maturity of technical intent and execution put the young artist in the class of the masters. In spite of his training in the manner of Western formal elements in which he made First Class, he never sacrifices African aesthetics especially in symbolism and motifs expressed with mastery of forms, composition and astute application of colours.

Mastery is demonstrated further in the handling of sensory of materials such as animal skin for canvas. His articulated animal skin paintings seem to supply the missing link between Mufu Onifade and his *Ara* disciples. The animal skin paintings are rendered naturalistically with the touch of professionalism that they seem so real that the underlying animal structure move with the images. The same skill is demonstrated in his batik canvas. He manipulates his palette knife to give the effect of brush thereby pushing *Ara* technique a little further. Thematic relevance is never sacrificed for the expertise, drawing inspiration from African spiritualization and acculturation. A good example is *Oju Gboro* (Fig. 180), which captures the bond between the mother and child in African context.

Oju Gboro is bordered in deep and light green framed canvas. Expressed in realism, the painting shows anatomical correctness of forms, compactness of composition and values of colour, including a clear representation of the reaction of forms to light at

dark. The motifs of a village house and African sense of communal living are very evident in the painting. Imafidor speaks loud and clear in his *Oju Gboro* about observance of communal life with respect to its advantage and its intrinsic Africanness.



Fig. 180: *Oju Gboro*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on canvas 120 cm × 90 cm, 2010.
© Jonathan Imafidor.



Fig. 181: *Protection*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on canvas, 60 cm × 45 cm, 2010.
© Jonathan Imafidor.

Imafidor has a way of picking many aspects of the aesthetics of his people. Born in Igara in Akoko-Edo, Edo State, a cultural state in every sense, the artist looks at masks and masquerades as expression of cultural dialectics. *Protection* (Fig. 181) articulates masks and masquerades as motif of cultural expression. Aesthetically, the painting uses the image of a girl in mist of masks and masquerades neatly framed in deep and light green. Expressed in dominance of patches of hues of green, red and yellow, the artist

stylizes the girl's figure amidst abstracted masks and masquerades in a ring at the base and triangle at the top. In fact, Imafidor portrays the sense of protection derivable from the spirits that possess the masks and masquerades. The components of this painting are gripped in coherence, tact and rhythm. The canvas is intertwined with all the components. One is not in doubt with the artist's skill in expressing hues and values in the painting to determine the dominant wavelength of the colours.

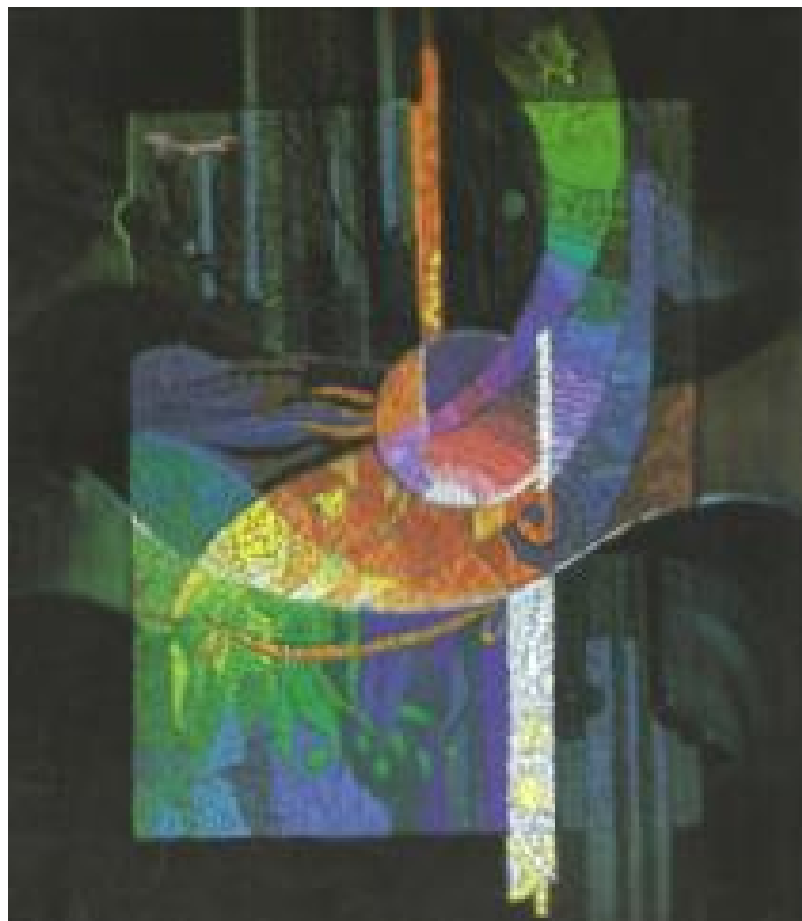


Fig. 182: *Fura De Nunu III*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on canvas, 90 cm × 75 cm, 2010.
© Jonathan Imafidor.

Like a writer who chooses any mode of expression to instill some form of consciousness in his readers, Imafidor conveniently switches from realism through

stylization to pure abstraction in the parlance of stylistics to talk to his audience. In any mode he chooses, his themes are very clear and logical. *Fura De Nunu III* (Fig. 182) exemplifies the clear and logical styles and theme in the idiom of colour. The artist borders the painting in an overall colour scheme dominated by hues of dark green, red and blue, which he juxtaposes for intensity and contrast such that the observer is kept moping for a while without seeing a recognizable object.

In his crusade against immorality, the artist uses legal marriage as weapon. He believes that the family is the little segment of the society, which invariably determines the quality of the society. Therefore, the artist feels that a family from a legal marriage lives within the tradition, which is a force in behavioral patterns. Then Imafidor discourages immorality through art, suggesting what society ought to embrace. *The Charge* (Fig. 183) captures marriage injunction. Expressed in realism, the artist laces the painting with variegated meanings. The reflection on the unity of purpose in a serene background of royalty suggested with hues of purple portrays a world of peace and progress. The band of gold on which is an emblem enfolds the couple in an approval by man and God. The artist costumes the male figure, an African, in English suit to portray the level of acculturation in Africa. Stylistically, the artist renders the images, which closed their eyes ready for a kiss in ecstasy on a background of straps of hues of purple in double borders. He defines the inner border with a strap of straight, curve, warp lines and irregular dots. Indeed, a close look at the painting reveals that Imafidor captures the transient moment of the climax of a wedding, stilling the action with knife and colour on canvas. He, therefore, gives the experience a memorable rendition that any trained eye will admire and derive its meaning.



Fig. 183: *The Charge*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on canvas, 92 cm × 61 cm, 2011.
© Jonathan Imafidor.

The artist is very consistent with themes and symbolism, using motifs as divine elements. Imafidor's symbolism of marriage with the horse and the rider scrupulously illustrates the tie between the husband and wife. *For Better For Worse* (Fig. 184) echoes the unity of purpose that *The Charge* earlier portrays. The artist composes *For Better For*

Worse as a warrior on a horse in motion, he drapes the human figure with the dress code of a Moslem holding a traditional spear. Both the horse and the human figure are bond in unity of purpose and a great sense of accomplishment. Aesthetically, the artist articulates the images on a canvas of flora motifs. The linear effects of the canvas reemphasize the rhythm of the drapery, which is in deep folds and undercuts. The dominant hues of green, red and blue were handled with mastery to give a feel of compact surfaces and texture. Thematically, Imafidor in *For Better For Worse* portrays the union between a husband and wife in Islamic canon.



Fig. 184: *For Better For Worse*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 61 cm, 2011.
© Jonathan Imafidor.

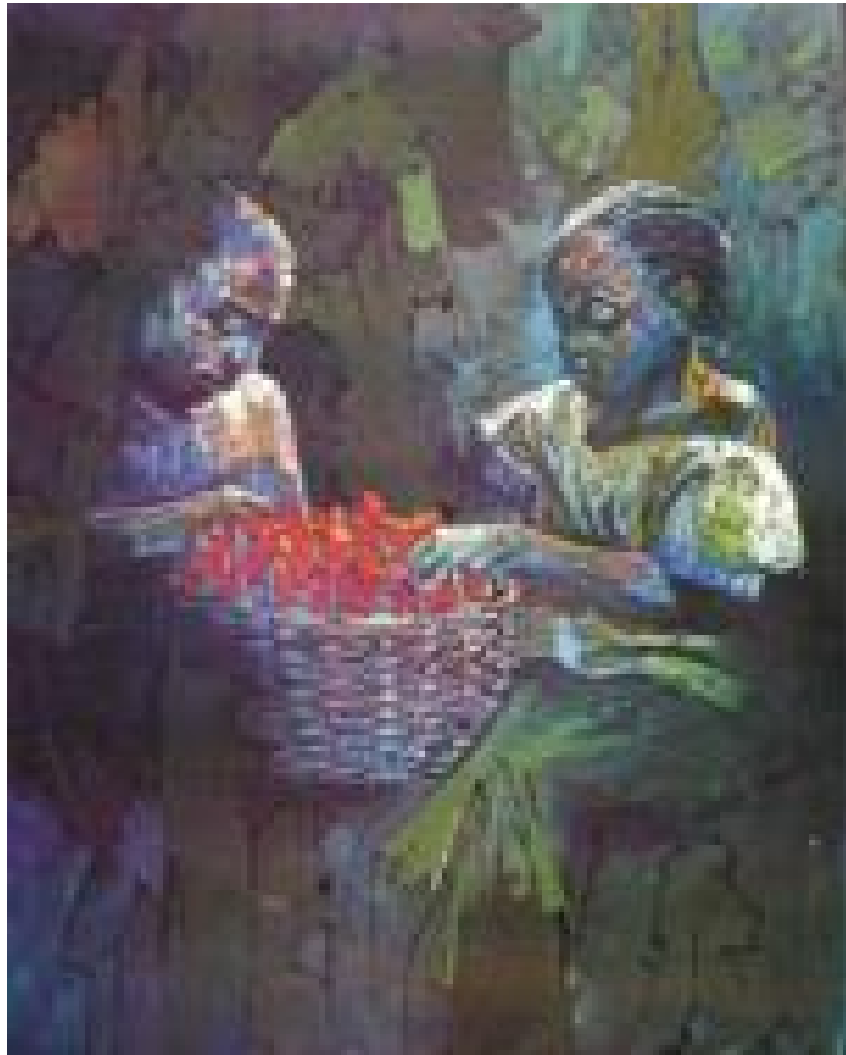


Fig. 185: *Another Day*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on canvas, 120 cm × 90 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Imafidor.

Evidently, the artist becomes a master of sensory of materials. He uses much material he chooses with the needed technicality and proficiency. This mark is obvious in his animal skin paintings. That he executes animal skin painting with great skill makes people to wonder where he acquired this skill. He reveals that the technique requires chemical treatment before artistic execution in order to prevent the skin from smelling and wrinkling. Imafidor transfers successfully his anatomical study into animal skin

painting. His animal skin paintings show a combination of aesthetics and correctness of forms. He will not suggest forms but actually creates them to give illusion of life.

His *Another Day* (Fig. 185) addresses economic issues, using figures of two little girls who carry a basket of tomatoes admiringly and fondle the tomatoes. The painting in realism uses patches of hues of dominant yellowish green instead of the conventional brown. The artist visualizes a kind of concentration from the children who gaze deeply at the tomatoes. They know that when the tomatoes are sold their mother will use the money to buy food and cloths for them. Since they have missed it today, they resorted to faith believing there is another day. Stylistically, Imafidor saw patches of yellowish green as an expression of thick vegetation, which formed the environment where the tomatoes were produced. The outlines of the images also vanished harmoniously into the background of the canvas, creating a sort of harmony that bind the painting together with great professionalism. The choice of bright hues of red at the middle of the painting is to create contrast between the succulence of tomatoes and of the hardness of bones of the human figures and trees. The folds of the drapery naturally obey the movement of the underlying structure, which introduce rhythm that the woven basket entails. The painting is highly successful.

For Our Children's Sake (Fig. 186) exemplifies Imafidor's mark of professionalism. On an animal skin, the artist creates the images of two children in realism. The treatment laces the painting with many illusions: the illusion of children wearing the skin as costume and the children who seem to come out of the animal. Procedurally, Imafidor stretches the skin tightly on a frame with the help of twines. He passes twine through the edges of the skin on one end and then ties it to the frame at the

other end. It is left to dry. He follows this with sketching the forms and application of hues. Stylistically, the artist creates the images in such innocent mood, as it is wont of children. Versed in anatomical study, Imafidor combines a high sense of aesthetics with correctness of forms as revealed in this painting. The animal skin visual embellish the painting in aesthetically tactual harmony.



Fig. 186: *For Our Children's Sake*, J. Imafidor;
acrylic on animal skin, 42 cm × 42 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Imafidor.



Fig. 187: *Life's Journey*, J. Imafidor, acrylic on animal skin, 42 cm × 42 cm, 2012.
© Jonathan Imafidor.

Life's Journey (Fig. 187), another of Imafidor's painting, further exemplifies the uniqueness of animal skin painting, showing natural surface quality it offers to content. Using female figure carrying locally produced milk for sale, the painting interestingly deploys the dialectics of aesthetics in hues and values of colour. The artist evolves mixed media mode of painting, which sums up in tactually embellished texture. The calabash he cuts into half and gummed to the painting as the container of the locally produced milk

gives the painting natural artistic piquancy. Further, the combination of natural bright brown from the calabash and off-white that the skin offers surpasses the application of artificial hues. In thematic stance, *Life's Journey* alludes to man on earth as a passer-by. Implicitly, he depicts the economic prestige of the Hausa people. No one can separate the Hausas successfully from *Fura De Nunu* (locally produced milk).

Temitope Olukotun



Temitope Olukotun, 2007
© Mufu Onifade.

One of the Ara disciples, Temitope Olukotun, was born on May 3, 1986, in Kogi State, where he had his primary school education. He obtained National Diploma in Art and Industrial Design from Lagos State Polytechnic. He also acquired informal training

in Jonix Studio. He did his Industrial Training at Ara Studio, Lagos. He has taken part in many group art exhibitions with paintings that made serious statements on the Nigerian economy, using realism as his style. The artist debuted in Araism Movement exhibition in 2010 with his realistic paintings, which included *Fish Seller* (Fig. 188). Composed with a seated pregnant figure, the artist draped her in a dress, wrapper and a large traditional hat to shade off sun in an open market. Stylistically, the artist creates it naturalistically by giving it anatomical correctness of forms and colour values.



Fig. 188: *Fish Seller*, T. Olukotun, acrylic on canvas, 91.4 cm × 66 cm, 2010.
© Temitope Olukotun.

Compositionally, the human figure and basket of fish in *Fish Seller* appear to be disharmonious. The cacophony of images and colour is created especially by contrast in

the colours of the figure and fish; there is no interplay of forms and colour. The figure can be removed without any damage to the canvas, the fish and the basket. The fish, basket and canvas form the second part. They are harmonious, coherent, and cannot be separated from one another without damage. Thematically, *Fish Seller* makes a strong statement on the poor economy of the country in which there is supply but little or no demand. The seller's mood does not hide her disappointment and frustration.

Odunbo Adeniran



Odunbo Adeniran, 2007
©Mufu Onifade.

Odunbo Adeniran, another *Ara* disciple, was born on November 13, 1986, in Ikorodu, Lagos. He obtained National Diploma in Art and Industrial Design from Lagos

State Polytechnic. He also acquired informal training in Jonix Studio. He did his Industrial Training at De Factori Studio, Ebute-Metta, Lagos. Adeniran has featured in many group art exhibitions communicating visually economic and entertainment themes. *Proteinous* (Fig. 189) captures the economy realistically, giving serious attention to anatomical study.

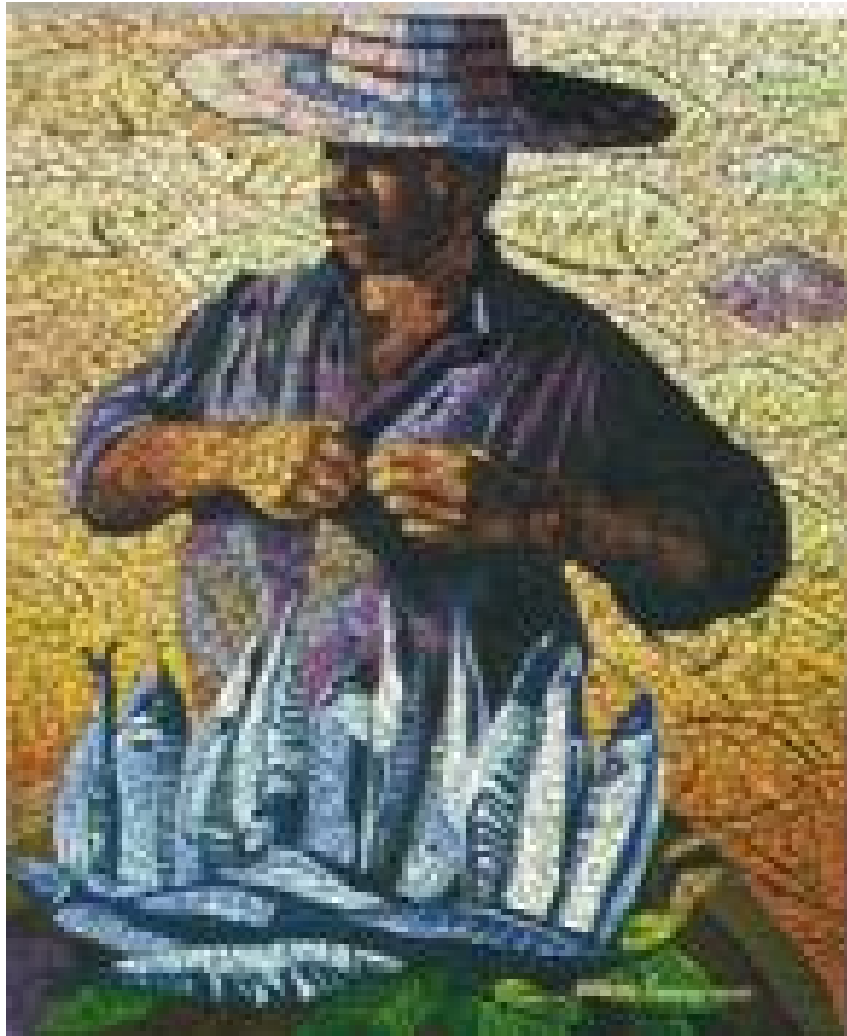


Fig. 189: *Proteinous*, O. Adeniran, acrylic on canvas, 80 cm × 66.2 cm, 2010.
© Odunbo Adeniran.

The artist composes this painting with an angler taking stock in his canoe. He seems to have just closed from business and she was proud of the catch of the day. Even

the river in yellow ochre as the background of the painting, which suggests an evening scene, is froth with the outlines of fish. Aesthetically, the painting is created in harmonious, coherent and unified compactness. However, the bright evening weather contrasts wrongly the objects and human figures. Overall, the painting is successful for its marriage of theme with technicalities.

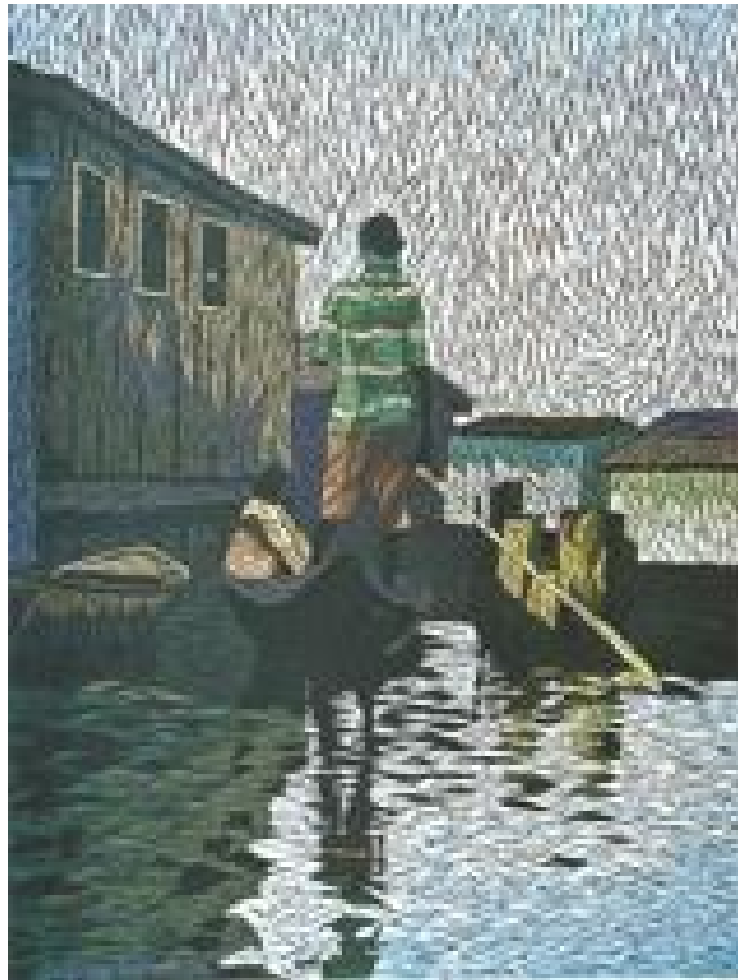


Fig. 190: *Living on Stilt*, O. Adeniran, acrylic on canvas, 74 cm × 55 cm, 2011.
© Odunbo Adeniran.

Living on Stilt (Fig. 190) lends credence to serious anatomical study. It testifies to themes and an astonishing style in the demonstration of mastery of forms, composition and values of colour. The painting avows obviously to Adeniran's penchant for his

cultural values and aesthetics in the idiom of African symbols and motifs. Compositionally, the artist renders a seascape where anglers anchor their fishing boats by their houses. The artist aesthetically cast the objects in deep shadow with reflection on the water. The light yellowish blue water suggests an early evening moon when the people are just beginning to set out for night fishing. The long bright paddle breaks the monotony of the deep shadows and connects the human figure that stands in the canoe. The mild bright background contrasts the deep shadow of the foreground. In the pursuit of economic themes, *Living on Stilt* portrays the riverine experience, showing the housing system, means of transportation and economic life of the people. The artist in his naturalistic painting articulates nature and man made objects, which are reconciled in the mastery of forms, symbols and hues of colour. Convincingly, this painting proves further that Adeniran's artistry is a mark of professionalism.

Adeniran switches from one style to the other, depending on the one that suits his theme and aesthetics. He dropped realism for expressive style to reflect the theme of entertainment. In expresivist style, Adeniran captures music as the food of the soul in *Soul of Entertainment* (Fig. 191). The artist articulates a violinist who appears lost in the inebriation of instrumentation to entertain his invisible audience. The artist aesthetically creates the details of the human figure that is cast on an undefined background with straps of dominant hues of red and green. The warp linear pattern of the background seems to echo the musical wave and notation of the music. The dominant hue of purple tends to suggest the class of audience as royal. With the ecstasy of the violinist, the invisible audience, indeed, is caught in the web of the symphony. Seated in rows, the

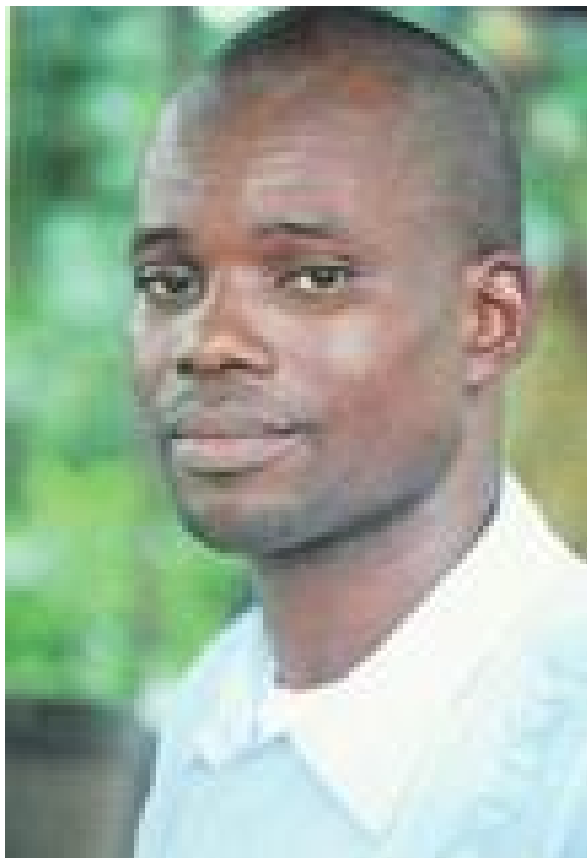
audience would be nodding her head and tapping the floor with her feet. The *Soul of Entertainment* is successful in communicating the theme of entertainment.



Fig. 191: *Soul of Entertainment*, O. Adeniran,
acrylic on Canvas, 74 cm × 56 cm, 2011.
© Odunbo Adeniran.

From the works above, Odunbo Adeniran takes interest in the riverine areas. Captures the economic activities and gives interpretation to them using works of art. He deploys fish as a metaphor in the articulation of man and his environment. Stylistically, Odunbo Adeniran treats the canvas and images as a unified whole. He uses the hues of purple and yellow to create a great feel of warmth even though his motifs suggest cold environment. This ability to juxtapose themes and images to attain grandeur in painting is, indeed, a mark of mastery.

Mathew O. Ojediran



Mathew Ojediran, 2011
©M. Onifade.

The *Ara* disciple, Mathew O. Ojediran, was born on 13th March, 1971. He hails from Itesiwaju Local Government Area, Oyo State. He obtained a National Diploma in Arts and Design from The Polytechnic, Ibadan, in 2005. In 2004, he had informal training in *Ara* art under Mufu Onifade and joined Araism Movement. He later attended Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts in 2008. He has been participating in group exhibitions in which he has given cultural themes and African aesthetics a serious attention. Some of the exhibitions he participated in are African Beauty, OAU, Ile Ife, in 2006 and Footprint, OAU, Ile Ife, in 2007.

Another memorable one is *Nigeria At 50*, by Society of Nigerian Artist, SNA, Oyo State Chapter, Ibadan, in 2010. Many of his works, including *Onirese, Legacy* (Fig. 192) reveal themes and style that portray Ojediran a committed artist of no mean reputation.



Fig. 192: *Onirese (Legacy)*, M. Ojediran, acrylic on canvas, 86 cm × 72 cm, 2011.
© Mathew Ojediran.

The artist is a cultural being; a product of environment. This attribute also shows in his expressed experiences, including his art. Ojediran expresses culture in his stylized *Onirese, Legacy* that is composed with musical objects and palm wine motifs, some of which sometimes intersect, grow out, lie side by side or penetrate into another. In spite of

this manner of composition, the objects are distinct with outlines delineating unambiguously to make their sections and transition very clear. The painting is aesthetically created to reflect double backgrounds; the dominant instrument in the nature of a gourd is one while the gourd itself is cast on another with a web of linear design in dominance of hues of red and green. The painting seeks to preserve culture by portraying the usefulness of traditional musical instruments and palm wine motifs in colour harmony and mastery of forms in African symbolism.

The artist is also sagely creative. The sageness and deployment of artistic apparatus in Ojediran's Ara art form a concerto of visual experience. The tone is unambiguously: a force for contentment. Many of his Ara artworks such as *Owo Omode o To Pepe* (Fig. 193) are compact with sageness and artistic experience. It captures the reality of life, using African motifs and symbolism. Composed in a combination of naturalism and stylization, the painting portrays difference modes of actualization, using a child and an adult to represent two conflicting but distinct world of experiences. The adult made no effort to touch the top of the gourd but he could not pass his hands through. Meanwhile, with all the effort to stretch hand while sanding on a turned mortar, he is unable to reach his target. The artist achieves a high sense of aesthetic value in this painting with correctness of forms and composition, using linear effect in both natural and mechanical manners. The gourds have their natural and artificial lines, which are echoed by the mechanical lines of the drapery. The artist's sense of colour values exemplified by the dominance of hues of red and blue to achieve contrast is aesthetically worthy of emulation. The artist creates unity between forms and canvas. Ojediran uses

this painting philosophically to teach the world contentment. Implicitly, there are things that one cannot change; therefore, only contentment would do.

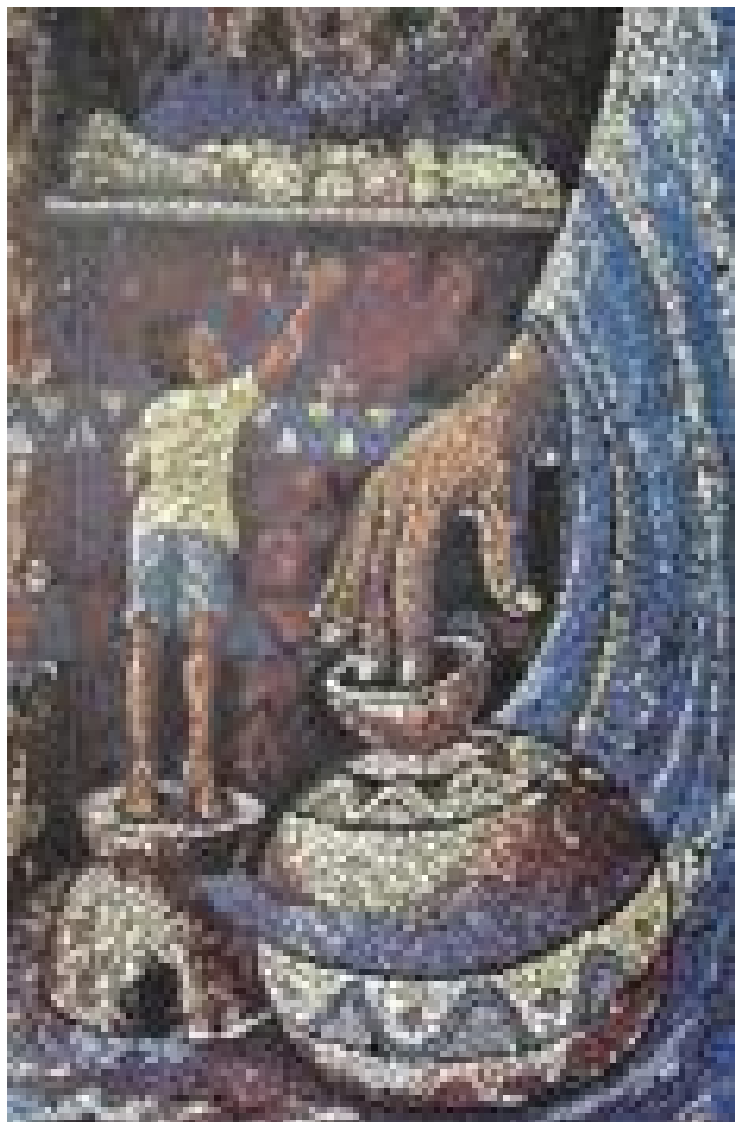


Fig. 193: *Owo Omode o To Pepe*, M. Ojediran,
acrylic on canvas, 110 cm × 76 cm, 2011.
© Mathew Ojediran.

Adekoke Akinola



Adekoke Akinola, 2010
© M. Onifade.

Adekoke Akinola was born in Lagos on 7th September, 1980. He attended Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, and obtained B.A. Fine Arts. Since graduation, he has been exhibiting constantly. Some of his exhibitions include UNFPA Competition, 2005; African Beauty, 2006; Footprint, 2007; Ifectivity, 2008; Ifectivity Reloaded, 2009, and National Gallery of Art Competition, 2009.

Adekoke Akinola acquires experiences from his constant participation in exhibitions. His appearance in Araism exhibition in 2010 with the *Twins* (Fig. 194) was not just another exhibition, but also a very profound one. Art collectors and fellow exhibitors were amazed with the quality of *Twins* and his other works. Compositionally, *Twins* uses three human figures to comment on childbearing and breastfeeding. A nursing mother seats on an elevation and carries twins. She is breastfeeding one of them. The

artist aesthetically drapes the nursing mother only at the loins thereby exposing the breasts to the children. While one twin relaxes on her laps, the other is busy sucking and grabbing the other breast with affection. The mother looks on with rap attention. He creates the work in a combination of naturalism and stylization. The minor forms on the face are naturalistic and transits smoothly. The headgear stands on the head without creases; a clear indication that it is stylized. However, it is in form of triangle with three sides penetrating into space. The barrel-like neck stands on the shoulders that runs into the breasts, which seems to grow from the chest to link the twin whose face is heavily stylized. The arms also grow from the shoulders and flow down to enfold the children with stylized hands. However, the nursing mother shows poor proportion. The artist creates the canvas in form of carpet with straps running across to grip the entire work in a web. The dominance of hues yellowish green and red on the figures and canvas create symphony that the lines emphasize.

Contextually, the artist visualizes childbearing and mother care, using a nursing mother as a model. The work is both historical and advisory. Historically, the artist reminds the viewers of the killing of twins which Mary Slessor stopped in the past. He regrets that what ought to be a source of joy was misunderstood and interpreted to give sadness. On advisory, the artist calls on all nursing mothers to breastfeed their children. *Twins* emphasizes the purity of breast milk over processed baby food and encourages the society to brace up with the challenges of modern nursing mothers who prefer processed baby food as a mark of civility.

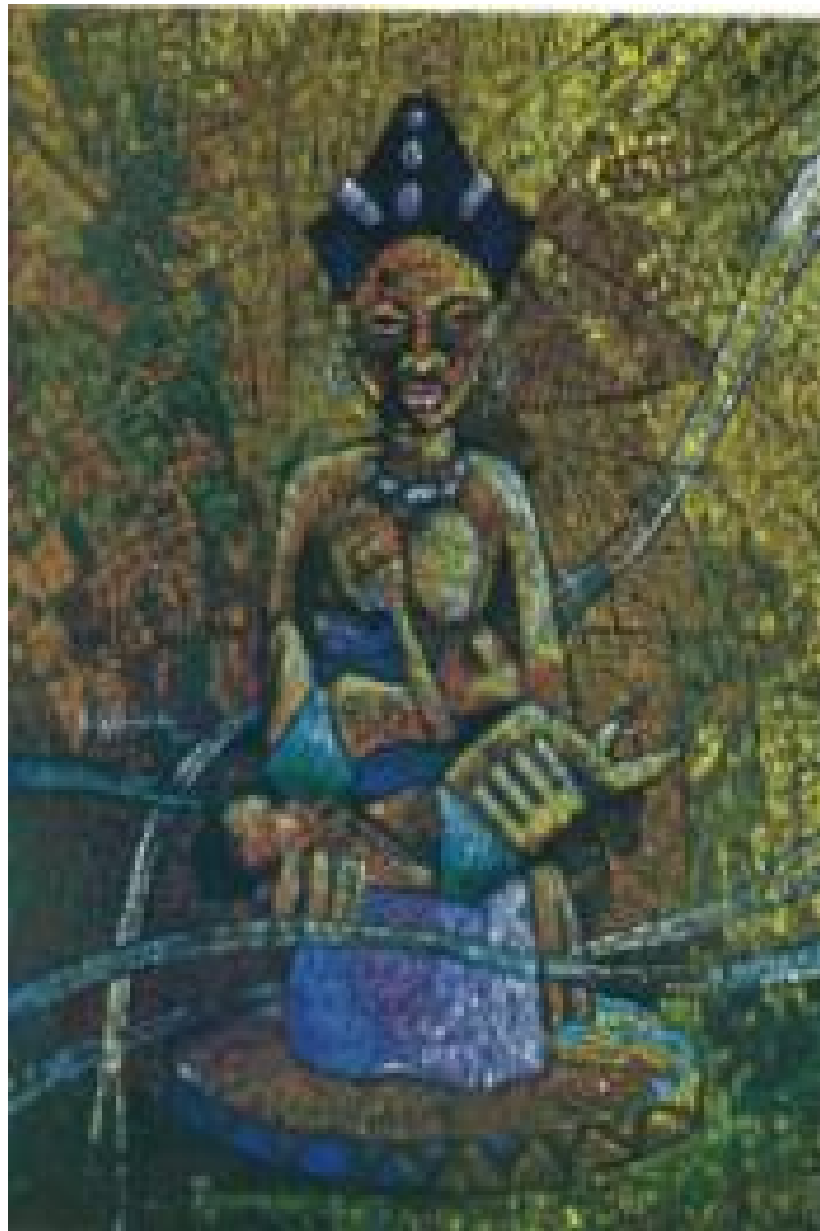


Fig. 194: *Twins*, Adeko Akinola, acrylic on canvas, 100 cm × 60 cm, 2010.
© Adeko Akinola.

From all works above, the disciples successfully prove that a work of art is a form of knowledge with intrinsic formal elements such as style, structure and theme that carries tone with it. They work assiduously to establish the correlation between style and theme to retain meaning, making sure that all the parts of each work are organized

logically in coherence. A critical response to the array of the works, and they must be viewed in the context of an array of works, portrays the evidence of individual styles in an overall Araism thereby putting to an end the harrowing debate about oneness and uniqueness of Araism. The works show chronological development with progressive excursion into professionalism thereby achieving a form of standard that other art movements and private art practitioners will emulate. A few disciples use the sculptural style of woodcarving but later advance to a more painterly style. However, at any stage of the chronology, what is very evident is the attempt to create individual style with canvas and the character of the crackles. The transfer of advance anatomical study of forms into line quality, resemblance, rhythmic development of parts and overall structure of forms, tone and proportion in the unity of canvas and images is creatively challenging to growing artists. Animal skin painting is taken to some aesthetic height and, very seriously, this reminds all of Onifade's great skill of transfer of knowledge to the disciples.

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12. Kesa Babatunde, artist; interviewed at Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, October 11, 2012.
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14. Akinsola Akinwumi, artist; interviewed at Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, October 11, 2012.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MUFU ONIFADE: THE ART CRITIC

The development of Mufu Onifade's writing has been closely connected with the renewal of African aesthetics in the dialectics of modern artistic history. In its earlier stage, his writing is expository through exhibition brochures on art mainly on African cultural and political consciousness. The later stage reveals the clarion call to elevate indigenous artistic experience to an equal dignity as is obtainable in the civilized world through the press. To closely examine and present these in a logical manner, the study relies on his selected texts, language, thought, meaning and context of utterance in art criticism. The study also considers formal elements of his writing, his technique of expressing speech sentence structure in poetic form, chronology and tone. His style of characterization and narrative technique are relevant to the study.

Mufu Onifade's Selected Texts

Human responses to particular works of art in order to analyze their structures, meanings, problems or to compare them with other works and evaluate them is a serious enterprise. This enterprise that is fundamental to art practice and art appreciation became formal in modern Nigeria art with Aina Onabolu when he came back from London in 1922 to start the formal teaching of art in Nigeria.¹ The responses to particular works of art assumed another dimension. This is more so that the press appeared in the art scene to start freelance art journalism. The number of indigenous art critics began to increase but was small until 1970. However, the number became very large in the 1970s. In this period, art journalism, especially before 1975, was more of freelance aided by newspaper editors.² By 1979, many art schools had introduced art history courses and art criticism

became a serious enterprise that is today celebrated. Indeed, the pioneers' contribution to art criticism is great.

While it is important to celebrate the culture and values of the pioneers of art criticism and art journalism as part of modern Nigerian art, it is also worthy of note that the vital culture is alive, energetic and challenging. It is rewarding to know that some budding art critics are bracing up to face the vital culture of art criticism. Among these budding art critics is Mufu Onifade, a great intellectual, whose art discourses with a compact texture of professionalism offer a panoramic view of the culture of art criticism in Nigeria. His art discourses, indeed, are worthy of critical study for their significance in philosophical content as their posture of revolt against some ills in the art world and their restless search for a new order.

Despite Mufu Onifade's great literary works, there has not been enough, if any, critical study, reviews and research on him. Though many Nigerian newspapers, magazines and exhibition catalogues have featured this great art critic, the essays on him lack focus and academic feel. Therefore, it is difficult to assess accurately the level of his literary development. Onifade's art discourses, especially have not been given adequate attention, if there is any, which is corresponding with the prolificacy. This suggests, therefore, that the value of his work neither is known to the academia nor is it generally evaluated for their relevance in modern Nigeria art.

Mufu Onifade is an acclaimed instrumentalist art critic who looks at art discourses as a social force and an ideological weapon. He attempts to proffer standard as the watchword in the Nigerian art landscape. His works reveal and reemphasize the relevance of art appreciation to society. Sociologically and ideologically determined, he strongly

believes that art appreciation takes its roots in society and deals with characters and situations taken from it. In the varieties of styles in writing, he uses two styles with equal competence in the pursuit of instrumentalistic art criticism. In his assessment of art exhibitions, using the exhibition brochure as medium of communication, Onifade applies expository style of expression. When the instrumentalist art critic evaluates art activities, using the newspaper as a medium of communication, he applies art journalistic writing, seeking to keep the rules of writing but with some peculiarities that help to individualize his writings. The erudite art critic, Onifade, has been endeared to the reading public by his characteristic modes of expression, meanings, choice and arrangement of words, which form his style in the parlance of instrumentalism. Above all, Onifade's trailblazing contribution in the path of war against plagiarism in the practice of visual arts also endears him to the public. The great intellectual attempts to observe standard as vanguard in his art discourses.

Beginning with Onifade's works on exhibition reviews/essays, his essay titled, "Index" in a catalogue also called, *Index: A Maiden Exhibition*, of a group of artists that goes by the name Index, comes to mind. Onifade finds in it a convenient form of canvas which he paints and weaves the art of storytelling to capture the artistic and social order of Index; a group of young artists resident in Lagos. The seven-paragraph structured essay is generally described as expository, which is aesthetically woven with registers/conceptual words to expose the activities of the group, such as art exhibitions and seminars. It lists the members, who are a crop of vibrant and daring artists set to make mark in their specialized areas. The essay makes no mistakes in using conceptual words to represent appropriately the defining details of the index finger as a signifier;

pointing to the right direction for other fingers to follow.³ The essay reveals the group's decision to grow numerically and to maintain professionalism among members. This study attempts to steer through the maze of expository structure of thought that Onifade characterizes by conceptual and symbolic diction.

With regard to choice of words, Onifade uses words in their denotative and connotative characteristics, which is appropriate to reflect the activities of the group. He connotes *Aino Onabolu* as subject of modernity and father of modern Nigerian art. In the same vein, he uses Universal Studios of Art to connote universality, which describes the influence of the members of the group who have set a standard for other artists to emulate. He pushes this point further in these metaphoric lines,

é re-establishes an engine room, a hyperactive environment to create and recreate an artistic soul of our collective existence as a highly cultural nation (par. 1, lines 6 and 7; p. 4).⁴

ñIndexò steers through the web of expository structure of thought, characterized by interlacing signifier, declaratives, conceptual and symbolic diction to achieve unity. Mufu Onifade uses words in a special way to signify reality. In ñIndexò, he selects and arranges words to evoke an image of a group of people with exuding potentials in a mismanaged-government setting. The form of the essay provides the ductility required for entwining artistic activities of the group in a seven-paragraphed article.

Onifade demonstrates further a command of language with the use of nonliteral expression to concretize a rather abstract essay, using signifiers/signified and onomatopoeic expressions. Although the onomatopoeic functions of the words, ñengineò and ñhyperactiveò help the reader to connect Aino Onabolu Artists Workshop and Studio of National Gallery of Art and the Universal Studios of Art to Lagos, the overriding

function of the words is the evocation of the inner soul of the ever-busy Lagos environment. The *ñsoulò* evokes inner temperament of the group. Onifade even becomes oracular in order to concretize that which is abstract: *é artistic soul of our collective existence as a highly cultural nation*.⁵ *ñMarriageò*, which signified Index (the group) as the product of marriage, calls to mind the unity and intimacy between the members of the two art studios.

The task of pursuing unity and coherence makes Onifade to deploy the declarative mode, opening every paragraph with declaratives. He uses words symbolically and spiritually to achieve contextual parlance. His deployment of words such as *professionalism, standardization, aesthetic, marriage of convenience, index finger, soul, residency*, among others, serves as a driving force to keep the essay in context.

Another of his selected exhibition review titled *ñBeyond Forms: A Mission Statementò* in the exhibition catalogue known as *Beyond Forms: Second Index Annual Exhibition*, captures the artistic activities of Index group of artists. Mufu Onifade uses it as a convenient form of backdrop, which interlaces the art of storytelling with the ductility of language to capture the social response to Index's maiden exhibition. It also captures the artistic experiences of Index as regards its second exhibition. The six-paragraph structured essay is described generally as expository, aesthetically woven with figures of speech. These include allusion, emphasis, symbolism and poetic devices among others to expose the artistic experiences of the Index. Onifade's diction makes use of words in their denotative and connotative mode, aptly to reflect a group of visual artists who are engaged in art exhibitions. To achieve unity and coherence, Onifade also

uses the declarative mode, opening and closing every paragraph with declarative statements:

As we emphasized in our maiden exhibition brochure, "Our philosophy rests on the vantage position of the index finger pointing to the right direction for other fingers to follow. We are still standing on our feet, and that's the result of this show, 'Beyond Forms.'⁶

The statements above are not only declaratives but also share in some of these nonliteral expressions: allusion, emphasis, symbolism and poetic devices to achieve contextual and coherent textures in artistic parlance. The essay relies heavily on the figures of speech above to set the tone of a group of artists who are determined to make a mark in art. The following poetic excerpt and many more denote the art activities of the group: *The exhibits here serve as a glimpse into the womb of INDEX.*⁷

Among the selected works is one entitled "Affinity" in an exhibition brochure, *Affinity: Index Third Annual Exhibition*. It unearths a convenient milieu, which interlocks the art of storytelling with professionalism to capture the artistic experiences of Index with respect to its third annual exhibition. The essay is structured into six paragraphs. Expository in form, it is aesthetically woven with every day expressions, an easy manner of effective communication to depict the artistic experiences of the Index. For the first time, he uses simple and easy to comprehend expressions in his essays/reviews. Although "Affinity" is easy to comprehend, it is critically poetic. Onifade coils his ideas round the words "Affinity" and "Index" in every paragraph. In this manner, he achieves a watertight exposition that is characterized by such device as repetition. "Affinitive" is a laudable art review, an unbiased artistic evaluation that marries the form of prose and poetics.

In an interview with Mufu Onifade, he explains the background of his writing on Index thus:

The work is expository in form, which explains and informs. However, I attempt to marry all that with creativity to be a better weapon of change. Therefore, I attempt to unmask a kind of fabrication about the uncontrollable creative essence. What I need is ideas. One should see the writing enterprise like literature, though it entertains, but it goes beyond that to become revolutionary potential, which is hidden behind entertainment. I fuse prose and poetics together to explain what could be done in prose in order to catch attention in the advancement of the reading public. My writing must be used to play a role in the advancement of the society.⁸

Onifade's "Much Ado About Philosophy" in *Araism Movement 2*, attempts to characterize Araism in a seven-paragraph review. The review states clearly the public opinion on Ara art. It also reveals the declaration of Araism movement. In the review, Onifade creates aesthetic evaluation by exploring the pliability of language, using words in their denotative form, including vernacular for emphasis. He frames up his ideas in the essay with the use of poetic/dramatic devices, opening the essay with "Here we go again!" and ending it up with "And continue, it must."⁹

Another of his selected art review, "Araism Movement: Here We Are" in *Araism Movement 5*, catalogues historically the events of Araism movement with stress on its 10th anniversary. Carefully selecting and using words in their denotation, he attempts to present the events of Araism as a support that reinvigorates an ongoing art exhibition of Ara paintings. He characterizes these in six paragraphs, capturing the past to serve as a background to the present with his thoughts flowing into one paragraph from the other in a sequence. As an art historian, he cleverly uses dates as connectives, weaving thoughts and events together in a spiral form to attain sequence, unity and coherence in a

cataloguing/expository essay. The essay hinges on ñAraismò, ñexponentò and ñDisciplesò, which appear virtually in every paragraph. ñDisciplesò here denotes followers/practitioners of *Ara* art technique (*Ara* art style), ñAraismò, which the exponent, Mufu Onifade, and his disciples founded as a movement. Very clearly, Onifade in his ñAraism Movement 5: Here We Areò offers an effective artistic assessment, unambiguous with its effective devices, which enable the past to live large in the present.

Onifade's ñAraism Movementò in *Araism Movement 7*, written in the third person, lends credence to connotations of words and technique of *Ara* art, cataloguing the events of Araism movement with stress on its 10th anniversary. It attempts to present the events of Araism in the form of a straightforward dramatic monologue to reinvigorate an ongoing art exhibition of *Ara* paintings. In the eight-paragraphed essay, Onifade reveals further the technique and the place of *Ara* art in contemporary art, using the word ñAraò as a tendency to identify the dramatic/poetic impulse with inspiration and artistic energy that envelops the artistic scene. Using flashbacks, Onifade introduces or reminds historically his readers of the establishment and launching of Araism movement with exhibition of paintings.

Presenting characters as divine painters (he and his *Ara* disciples) with exuding potentials, he reveals that the event was meant to relaunch a celestial *Ara* as ñauthentic rich artò, ñwonderò and ñthunderò. His choice of linguistic elements, which help to unfold the structure of the essay, is further enhanced by motifs of human and art history. The motifs and manner of his characterization of *Ara* offer structural and thematic unity, which define the essay. Opening and closing each paragraph with interplay of the signifier and the signified also tie up the essay in coherence. In conclusion, ñAraism

Movementò is linguistically appropriate and thematically relevant. Indeed, the essay is successful as it finds relevance in addressing topical issues with *Ara* art.

Another of the critic's essay, 'Araism: Why Whisper Araism?' in *WHISPER ARAISM: MUFU ONIFADE*, makes known the different stages of development of Ara art. Using a question title, *Araism: Why Whisper Araism?* which the body of the essay weaves around, Onifade attempts to give answer to it and others to capture public opinion on Ara art. He supplies photographs to the essay as amplifiers. Writing in the first person, Mufu Onifade captures a simple but detailed form of art review, leaving no grey areas as to what some members of the public want to know about Araism. However, he did not run away completely from his usual poetic expressions:

And thus began an exploration into a new art technique through protracted experiments that became almost endless until 1995.¹⁰

He demonstrates his knowledge of art history in picking every relevant detail. Historically, he traces the development of the experiment of Ara art, which evolves from artistic study of batik crackles and effects from the beginning. He reveals that several art pieces were made over two years with hobbytex paint on batiked canvas whose crackles are the main center of attraction. He further reveals that the crackles effect engendered further research into materials and, most importantly, technique. His 'Araism Movementò in *Araism Movement 9* traces the history of Araism in a four-paragraph essay. Writing in the third person, he marries the simple form with dramatic usages to achieve technical effects in statements of fact that capture vividly the history of Araism. The deployment of the third person pronoun, he, to characterize the exponent of Araism helps to dethatch Onifade from the ownership of Araism to become an interested and unbiased observer.

Onifade's "Realism in Self Assertion: Muses and Fuses on the Art and Creativity of Olumide Oresegun" in *Movement of Reason*, is the critique of exhibition of paintings of Olumide Oresegun. He explores the yielding nature of language for great effect. Sometimes he becomes poetic/dramatic and at other times, plain but very compact, thereby portraying words as the dress of thoughts. Beginning with the poetic device, he welcomes the reader to a poetic title as well as an opening paragraph in poetics, quoting Okekanye's poem of two stanzas of three and five lines respectively:

If I am not for myself
Who will it then be for me?
For me to beé ¹¹

A dramatist of high regard, he also uses monologue and epilogue to convey his message of Oresegun's brash adventure in art. Versed in the arts, Onifade illustrates the differences between naturalism and realism, citing the work of Lynton on realism. Employing poetic device, he personifies realism to explain the formalistic nature of realism and naturalism and their similarity. The essay explains why some artists produce only abstract works, which has little or no restriction as against works in realism with restrictions. It reveals that Oresegun produces his works, in spite of the restrictions, in realism and then recommends that he should be commended. The art historian deploys his knowledge of Art History in order to show the influence of photography over time in realism. Therefore, he cites Bellis on invention of the camera traces the use of photography in painting and justifies the use of camera as support to producing the works of art in realism. To characterize the artist clearly, Onifade becomes poetic, associating Oresegun, the painter, with his working tool by describing him humorously as "none of Nigeria's vibrant brushes"¹² with consistency in practice:

By virtue of his consistency of practice and productivity, Olumide Oresegun has become one of Nigeria's vibrant brushes and is here (away from his ever-busy studio schedules) to give to the art public some of those aesthetic refreshments he has spent time to devise in recent times¹³

He classifies the exhibits into five on their thematic relevance. Revealing his nature as an instrumentalist art critic, who does not spare the artist's weak areas, Onifade points out the frail areas in the exhibition. He suggests that, if the artist must be like his mentors, he needs to improve on his skill of draughtmanship because his expression of anatomy, perspective and foreshortening is weak. The following excerpt attests to his shrewdness:

Oreseguné may have found his rhythm, but he still needs to practice more to perfect his art. He needs to clean up the rough edges to be able to build on his strengths. é but he still needs to work on his anatomy, perspective and foreshortening if indeed, he truly aspires to reach a spot of mastership like his mentioned mentors¹⁴

This essay is remarkably successful as a compact, unified and coherent critique with the use of diction well chosen for a descriptive analysis. Though it is sometimes poetic, but is able to appeal to a large public for its sequence, power of vivid characterization and ability to use imageries to enliven a rather abstract thought.

ñAbayomi Barber: Regeneration, Re-fertilization and Revitalization of a School of Thoughtò in *Dance of the Mind*, another interesting and critical essay of Onifade clearly discusses the life and art of Abayomi Barber. The essay begins with its overview of an artist, who, it thinks, falls into Abayomi Barber's description. It draws inferences from Layiwola's work, ñWhen does an Artist become a Masterò, which reveals that the artist is a sojourner, who travels in a bid to discover himself. It raises rhetorically some of the questions that Layiwola attempts to answer. Onifade uses the essay to characterize the

period preceding the emergence of Barber as an artist and Abayomi School, taking the reader to when Barber started his career and acknowledging some of the challenges that Barber had in his office. Very aptly, he typifies the school and its ideological stance thus:

The evolution of Abayomi Barber as an artist was gradual but total. It eclipsed with many disciples, some of whom are on this show. They all share realism/surrealism, an affinity which Barber himself imbibed from his training abroad. The school thrives on existing ideology of realism, which Barber believes is the bedrock of art.¹⁵

The critique groups Barber's art career into periods of regeneration, re-fertilization and revitalization, clearly showing the characteristics of each of them. It is very clear while revealing some salient informal characters that are peculiar to the style of art, which invariably make it Barber Abayomi School. Onifade uses the essay to analyze the exhibits on their formal character and thematic dialectics, describing some works as a complicated web of creativity woven with multiplicity of ideas to tell many stories in a limited space. He concludes the review by characterizing Abayomi Barber as a colossus: "Professor Abayomi Barber, in view of the foregoing, is like a colossus whose gait and posture bestride our consciousness through art..."¹⁶

The critique is successful in the dialect of instrumentalism with a web of ideas woven in sequential order, especially in a highly professional texture. It is very direct in its attempt to characterize, analyze, interpret and pass an unbiased judgment on an artist of the older generation who many see as an oracle in modern Nigerian art. This character in Onifade is also very revealing in his art journalism.

Mufu Onifade's art journalism aptly captures him as an instrumentalist critic. His art discourses in newspapers have a wide span with many newspapers including *The Guardian* and *234 NEXT*, which take the lead. Indeed, the literary works in art journalism

have generated controversy among artists, collectors, gallery owners and the reading public. However, what the controversy cannot take away from the works is the humanistic functionality of themes and style of his news features.

In "When a Gallery destroys its Progenitor's Legacies" in Onifade's column, *Artsassessment*, in *The Guardian* (Dec 3, 2010; p. 40), he examines the exhibition of paintings in Wangboje Art Gallery. In it, he bares his mind on the poor manner the gallery conducted the exhibition, which was itself very poor. In the news feature structured in multiple columns, Onifade uses straightforward language as required by the form, which he amplifies with paintings. Alluding to Wangboje, he, in the first column, casts aspersions on the management of the gallery named after Wangboje, which poorly exhibited the paintings. However, he acknowledges the luster of late Irein Wangboje, one of the pioneers of modern Nigerian art, in contrast to the ill manner of his gallery:

If Irein Wangboje, one of the late fathers of modern Nigerian art, were alive last Saturday, his name and tact administrative finesse for which he was known and respected would have rubbed off on a joint exhibition held in a gallery named after him.¹⁷

He characterizes the gallery's failure and regrets its inability to live up to its progenitor. He describes the shoddy arrangement of the exhibition as a "show of shame" which contrasts a better exhibition that was showing simultaneously in a nearby gallery, Quintessence Gallery: "While this show of shame was going on at the Wangbonje Art Gallery, the Quintessence Gallery in the same Ikoyi axis was busy stealing the show"¹⁸

He concludes the news feature by drawing a line between the two galleries and enjoins Art Galleries Association of Nigeria to wake up to its responsibilities. The news feature achieves grandeur of instrumentalist criticism, knotted in unity, coherence, appropriate diction and thematic feel. It weaves his ideas tightly round the theme of

failure and disappointment without any form of deviation. Journalistically, the essay maintains standard while providing answers to the five Ws and H, meaning who, what, where, when, why and how which feature in many news story.

Onifade's 'Hellenic Images; Nigerian Artists in Adulteration' *The Guardian* (March 30, 2007; p. 45), captures failure and disappointment about an art exhibition. The news article is written in functional English, straightforward and easy to read journalistic form, which is structured in two columns of fifteen paragraphs. In the opening paragraph, he introduces the reader to failure and disappointment:

In their characteristic mannerism, some Nigerian artists beat their qualified, selected counterparts to a game of hustling in a quest to be part of a unique show, but ended up adulterating the whole process that also gave birth to a poor outing.¹⁹

He takes the reader to Greece embassy at Ikoyi and unravels the well attended but poor exhibition of March 23, 2007, which marked Greece National Day. He introduces the reader further to the two artists who were exhibiting, one, photography while other painting and sculpture. He compares the two artists on exhibition, praises the one with photography and condemns the other with painting and sculpture exhibits. He describes the quality of the paintings and sculptures, revealing that many were not qualified for display but the convener was too enthusiastic to care. Revealing the reasons for the failure, he traces them to lack of commitment by the convener who nursed the idea of the exhibition. He reveals a list of firebrand artists who were selected earlier to participate in the exhibition and whose resolution was to achieve standard, but were later abandoned. He admits that he was delighted in them. He reveals further, what he calls the 'Nigerian Factor', that it took over the preparation for the show to a fault. He traces other causes of

the failure of the exhibition by resorting to asking questions rhetorically and answering them to help the reader's understanding.

The news feature achieves instrumentalist criticism, showing approval or disapproval where it is necessary. Linguistically, the essay achieves journalistic process, using sequential order and flashbacks to connect the past with the present. Overall, is topical and thematically relevant to humanity.

Onifade, in "Arts groups and varying platforms in Nigeria" (234*NEXT*, August 21, 2011; p. 38), reveals the artists' almost impossible condition to market their art works vis-a-vis production. He structures the news feature in a journalistic form in a six columns and five subheadings in fifteen paragraphs. He invigorates the article with two surrealist paintings of Yusu Grillo both titled, "The Pair". One painting has two female figures in Yoruba attire but the other has the image of a female bust. In functional English, straightforward and easy to read journalistic form, Onifade introduces the reader to artists' difficulty in combining studio practice with marketing their art works. He acknowledges the few art groups that are able to combine the two and pays kudos to them. A great and regular art exhibitor, he distinguishes between the burden of solo and group exhibitions in the bid to market works of art. He admits that the sole exhibitor bears all the cost, but asserts that even in group exhibition somebody still bears the brunt.

A veteran art historian, Onifade reveals many existing art groups and those that have folded up or are in the process of folding up. Knowing the challenges of art groups, which force many to fold up, he asks that those that confront their problems should be accorded respect. He traces the influence of the "Zaria Rebels" (Zaria Revolutionists) on Ulism of Igbo body decoration leaning and reveals their success in the development of

contemporary Nigerian art. He traces further the development of art groups from Mbary Mbayo through Ori Olokun Experiment to Onaism. Heavily armed with the knowledge of art history, he recounts the emergence of Atunda Group of Artists whose constitution was made up of some staff of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, who used the group to enhance their academics. Chronologically, Onifade develops the story further to include the Universal Studios of Art, which, in his opinion, has become the biggest art studio in Nigeria but with some initial rough edges. Finally, he leads the reader to the busy nature of art groups in Lagos and portrays it as the heart of art activities in the country.

This essay demonstrates great knowledge of art history and a flair for journalistic writing. It achieves unity and coherence by its uninterrupted sequential development of ideas. It is a successful news feature with easy-to-follow sentences in their simple, compound and complex structures. Thematically, the story is humanistically functional with varying interests in indigenous art history.

Art groups and varying platforms in Nigeria (2), another of Onifade's news feature, examines art groups. It reiterates his earlier position on the difficulty faced by artists to market their products. In the journalistic form, the news story is illustrated with an untitled surrealist painting. The news story begins from where the above article stops with the characterization of Lagos as the centre of art groups and art activities in Nigeria. Beginning with female artists groups, which he considers more diversifying in scope, Onifade characterizes Female Artists Association of Nigeria (FAAN) that is led by Bridget Nwanze as protestant in nature:

First is the Female Artists Association of Nigeria (FAAN), which held its maiden exhibition, titled 'A New Birth' in 2001. Led by Bridget Nwanze, the group is protestant in nature, as it constantly cries against the patronage of male artists above the females²⁰

Onifade divulges that another women group by name Women in Visual Arts (WIVA) was established in 2005 and that it was dedicated to only female artists. He adds that it operated more in Lagos, using the National Museum, Onikan, as its operational base. He reveals further the group's main objectives as to celebrate the creative ingenuity of women, inspire young female artists to express their creativity, create a networking platform among the upcoming artists, established artists, connoisseurs, and the public.

He discloses another female group, Female Artists in the Academia (FAC), led by Victoria Ukpera. Onifade discloses the motto of the group where he cites a speaker in their first exhibition, Joe Musa, former director general of NGA, that the irresistible idea of the exhibition arose out of the great and sufficiently fascinating history and importance of the Nigerian female artists.

The review challenges the creed and wisdom in the idea of a complete female group, pointing out some challenges inherent in female artists. He discloses that some the problems include sub-standard, getting engrossed with marital or economic matters and submitting the same old works for different exhibitions. Onifade reveals another group, The Train, which attempted to challenge the idea of selling their artworks outside their immediate environment. He regrets that The Train, which presented a beautiful foreword that borrows from George Bernard Shaw, ceases to exist in a short while. He also reveals that De Factori Studios emerged in the scene and that it seems to be more vibrant as it still exists. He also regrets that Index Group, which joined the train, has collapsed in a short while. Finally, Onifade, in the article, leads the reader to more short-lived groups, such as Extremely Talented Artists (ETA).

The news story has been technically developed in a unified and coherence manner. It is a successful feature article with fascinating interplay of various sentence structures – simple, complex and compound complex. Thematically, the story is humanistically functional with varying interests in indigenous art history.

The writer's – Ulli Beier: Unfulfilled dream of a true Africanist – eulogizes Ulli Beier, a non-artist giant in the promotion of indigenous art, at death. In journalistic form, he amplifies the news story with a group photograph in theatrical mode, captioned – Beier collaborated with the Duro Ladipo Theatre Group – and the portrait painting of Beier's son in *adire* admiring some art works hanging on the wall. The writer introduces the reader to the news of the death of an art giant at a period the country was entangled in the cancellation of election results. The feature attempts to advance reasons for doubting the news of Beier's death and regrets that no one cared about the man who did much for Nigerian art. The story reveals the miss-up as to the date of his death, but supports the version from Muraina Oyelami, one of Beier's many artistic children, from Iragbiji.

The article bemoans unfulfilled promises of Beier, acknowledges Beier's efforts in bringing the nation's art to international lime light but regrets the non-appreciation of the man. He traces the history of Ulli Beier and his visionary experiments and reveals the complementary efforts of Beier's wife, Georgina. He traces the background of the members of the Mbary-Mbayo Club and that of the efforts of Beier in theatrical parlance. The news feature reveals Beier's family background, his successful efforts in the arts though he was not an artist. Finally, Onifade concludes the story on a very sad note, pointing to the unfulfilled dream of Beier. The article could not have been written in a better co-ordinated and comprehensive language with meaning and humanistic

functionality. The theme and all the ideas developed sequentially in a spiral form that cannot be broken. It is a great success.

Onifade's "Artist as Promoter of his Creative Outputs" in *The Guardian*, Feb. 18, 2011, comments on the efforts of the artist to market his art. Writing in simple, straightforward and easy to read journalistic form, he amplifies the news story with a painting of two female figures in gossip, titled "Market info" by Bimbo Adenuga. The writer/artist and critic introduces the reader to a disturbing trend in which artist have to market their own artworks:

Though a disturbing trend, the Nigerian artist seems to now contend with the burden of promoting his own creative products. This has become a commonplace scenario among the comity of exhibiting artists, whether such shows are held individually or collectively.²¹

The article reveals how the pioneer art masters viewed and handled their art, which contrasts the new trend that is described as sordid. The story discloses that, perhaps, to beat the ugly trend, the Society of Nigerian Artists, Lagos State Chapter, increased exhibition participation fees to survive. The writer describes the nonchalant attitude with which he is displeased with the present art galleries. He draws a line between the past and present behavior of galleries. He concludes the news story on a very sad note, asking pathetic questions:

By extension, where are the artist managers? é How will the artist produce quality works if he still has to be his own manager and run around for funds to promote himself? ²²

"Visual Definition Straight from the Conscience" in *234NEX*, April 24, 2011, another of Onifade's functional works, reflects on the painter, Donald Onuoha, and his exhibition that held in Omenka Gallery in Ikoyi, Lagos. He strengthens the news feature

visually with two simplified cubic paintings titled "The Head" and "Two Heads are Better than One" by Donald Onuoha. He weaves ideas around a theme of visual definition. The opening paragraph leads the reader to the painter, his exhibition and the sponsors of the exhibition. He introduces the background of the artist and explains the theme of the exhibition, *'Conversation With my Conscience'*.

He characterizes Onuoha's artistic skill and mannerism, which his paintings reveal. Finally, he asserts that if the artist maintains the style in his paintings then he will be achieving what he calls authentic African cubism: "If the style is maintained with consistency, we may be on our way to experiencing what may eventually become an authentic African cubism."²³

Onifade "In the Web of Plagiarism" in *234NEXT*, May 1, 2011, reveals the issue of art plagiarism in a news feature. He gives artistic energy to the story with photograph of two paintings, one by Abiodun Olaku titled "Citiscapè" and the other by Fagorusi Segun at work with the caption "compare work with Olaku's Citiscapè". In the first paragraph, Onifade describes Olaku as one of Nigeria's most brilliant artists. He also introduces the reader to the Facebook of Olaku containing what he calls the criminal activities of a young artist, Fagorusi. The next paragraph introduces the reader to the search for Fagorusi and his claimed ignorance of Olaku. He also reveals different responses in Olaku's Facebook, all condemning the alleged criminal act of Fagorusi. Onifade justifies the varied comments and calls for punishment.

The article vividly exposes the reader to plagiarism in the academia, describing the trend as intellectual murder and recommends punishment. Finally, Onifade uses the news story to bring the reader to plagiarism in the galleries and enjoins Art Galleries

Association of Nigeria and the Society of Nigerian Artists to embrace the challenge. The essay successfully deals with the theme of plagiarism. The characterization provides unity of structure and theme. Elements that border on character of elitist and plagiarism such as authorship, copyright, infringement, intellectual property, accuse, claim and authorship of creative literary works are motifs of intellectualism and plagiarism.

This news feature attracted some public reactions to Onifade. One particular reaction is that of Fagurosi captioned 'I did not plagiarize Olaku's work (By Fagurosi Segun)'. This article is a rejoinder to Mufu Onifade in his column, 'Art of the Mather' published in *234 NEXT* May 8, 2011; p. 38 in response to his 'In the Web of Plagiarism'. The artist, Fagurosi Segun, fired back at Onifade that he did not plagiarize. He began by borrowing the definition of plagiarism from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English and he condemns Onifade for accusing him of plagiarizing Abiodun Olaku. The article, 'I did not plagiarize Olaku's work', gives the background to the accusation and denial. The story acknowledges that he was lost with the comments in the Face book. He cited some and he informs that he has posted the photograph of his painting in Facebook.

His 'A competition without integrity' in *234NEXT*, May 8, 2011 is a call to artists to withdraw from a painting competition organized by the Caterina de' Medici of Africa for poor professionalism and disrespect. The article is given energy with the photographs of Oliver Enwonwou captioned 'Oliver Enwonwou protested the "disrespectful" treatment of artists' and that of Foluke Michaels captioned 'Foluke Michaels of Caterina de Medici Africa'. In the journalistic literary genre, Onifade describes the nature of the unprofessionalism he accuses Foluke Michaels of, distinguishing between the previous

occasion and the present that the requirements and attached incentives run at variance with those of last year's competition.

He introduces the reader to the fact that neither Ms Michael nor her representatives were willing to meet the artists and he refers to this as disgrace. He compares the prices of last year, present compactions, and the contradictory opinions of the organizers and the artists. He reveals that Society of Nigerian Artists moved in to reject the unprofessionalism, withdrew its members and gave a press release. Finally, he discloses that the organizer resorted to blackmail, fronting with Soyinka's name when they should not because he, Soyinka, had earlier advised against the hosting. The linguistic machinery, which helps in the evolution of the structure of the news feature, makes the work very interesting. This is complemented by the design of the dialectics of human history, providing unity of structure and theme. The words such as ridiculous prize money, competition, solidarity call, via internet, press release and lack of funds are message models of dialectics of society on competition and integrity.

The art writer's "Shodaism: An unripe ism in Art Lexicon" in *234NEXT*, June 12, 2011 captures the entry of a new style in art in Lagos. Onifade commends the works of a young exhibiting artist, Ayoola Shodade. However, he clearly reveals his worry over the artist who attempted to coin for his art style an appellation from his name Shodade to Shodaism. He condemns metamorphose of Shodade to Shodaism because the exhibits which represent a new style in art lack standard professionalism. Onifade energizes the news article artistically with the photograph of one of the exhibits, a painting titled "Okun Oma Iya". In the first paragraph, he introduces the reader to acknowledgement, commendation and worries about the works and artistic lexicon of Ayoola Shodade. In

the next paragraph, he introduces Shodade's teacher/mentor, Rukeme, who allegedly coined the appellation, shodaism. In the writer's opinion, Rukeme's attributive shodaism, is premature and, therefore, derides it. Wanting an explanation on the art style, Onifade asked the artist and his mentor to explain the background to the style. He captures the background thus:

According to Rukeme, "Shodaism is Shodade's peculiar type of artistic experiment, where he utilises various found objects, in creating a curio type of art (O'bjct D'art) via a near bas-relief picture plane"é In Shodade's explanation, he was inspired by Ankara fabric patterns: "This Ankara fabric revolution brought in the use of lines as characters in my work."²⁴

Paragraph three describes the artist as one who has artistic skill but very undeveloped and enjoins other artists who are more experienced to advise him. The instrumentalist art critic did not stop there but characteristically traces the history of some art movements from which artists could learn. The writer takes the reader through the history of Western isms, beginning with Mannerism through Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism to Impressionism. The new story also lists out other isms, reveals that each ism has distinct character as distinguishing factor and traces the history of isms in Nigeria. Finally, he returns to Shodaism while revealing why it is not unique and not worthy of any classified ism. The news story is compact with the design of the dialectics of art history, providing a sound base for critical analysis. The words such as premature-ism, original-ism, other-ism, Nigerian-ism, style, unique and style are message molds of dialectics of professionalism.

However, another art writer, Bunmi Ajiboye, of the same newspaper has a contrary view to Onifade's on Shodade's creativity. Titling his news feature, "Shodade's

Creative Visual Axioms, the newspaper, *234 NEXT*, published it in the same page and edition of Mufu Onifade's "Shodaism: An unripe ism in Art Lexicon". The newspaper did this, perhaps, to let the public see the judgment of both art writers on Shodade's creativity and take a position.

The art historian's "The mute of the beneficiaries" in *234NEXT*, June 26, 2011, eulogizes two greats, Tayo Aderinokun and Taiwo Olaniyi, Twins Seven-Seven, in the spirit of artistic excellence and promotion of indigenous art. The news feature is on the death of Tayo Aderinokun and Taiwo Olaniyi, Twins Seven-Seven. Onifade amplifies the story with the two photographs; one is of an art event in which the image of late Taiwo Aderinokun stands tall and the other is a painting of three women. Journalistic in form and lexis, the news story begins with introducing the reader to models of sadness on the death of some art promoters. Onifade achieves this by describing the dead and characterizes the emotion in the art circle because of the news of the death. Onifade reveals the events earmarked to celebrate Olaniyi as an international figure in the art before the news of his death:

Twins Seven- Seven was a big guy in art. He was one of the best things to have happened to Nigerian art. He was internationally recognised and was a UNESCO Ambassadoré ²⁵

The article discloses the author's disappointment with Tayo Aderinokun's burial arrangement, which did not include any visual art activity but of literature. It asserts that literature alone is not enough to celebrate the spirit of artistic excellence and promotion for which Tayo stood. The news feature supports his assertion by revealing the participation of Guaranty Trust Bank in the visual arts through the efforts of the late Aderinokun. Furthermore, he reveals the relationship that Terra Kulture, Mydrim Gallery

and GTB built in the visual arts, emphasizing late Tayo Aderinokun of GTB as a great private art collector. Lastly, the story discloses many other beneficiaries of the efforts of late Tayo Aderinokun through Terra Kulture and regrets the non-inclusion of visual art event in the burial arrangements.

“The mute of the beneficiaries” is an accomplished art review with art historical and linguistic tools. The blueprint of the dialectics of human history complements this. It is clear that Onifade, an artist and art critic, is a righter of wrongs. The words such as flicker, realm, sadness, promotion, beneficiaries, dead and mute are message models of dialectics of life and death tied to the visual art activity under review.

Onifade’s “AGAN: The dreamer, the dream and the dreamed” in *234 NEXT*, July 10, 2011, reflects the Art Galleries Association of Nigeria (AGAN). The news story is given artistic energy with two photographs. One depicts children with the legend, “Young and old trouped to previous Art Expos at the National Museum”. The other has images of artworks with the legend, “33 galleries from Nigeria, Togo and Republic of Benin participated in the 2009 Art Expo”.

Journalistic in form and lexis, Onifade begins the news story by introducing the reader to the characterization of the Art Galleries Association of Nigeria (AGAN) and then raises some pertinent questions. The story discloses the emergence of Art Galleries Association of Nigeria, the circumstances surrounding the Art Expo that National Gallery of Art organized and recalls the memories of 2008. He then berates the weakness and eventual collapse of the association. He did not hesitate to give the background of the officials who could not run the association.

Onifade reveals the dreamer's speech, which was sequel to the meeting he held with gallery owners prior to the first expo in 2008. The speech assures a yearly hosting, the weakness in the formation of the association in involving faceless galleries and anticipated action of well-informed art patrons. Finally, the story enumerates the "hydra-headed" problems of the association. These include complaint that some of the members do not have gallery space that there are many galleries whose physical structures only exist in art expo's catalogues. It adds that meetings are conducted improperly because some members divulged information on the pedestal of anonymity.

The writer deploys appropriate words and sentences and well developed paragraphs to stir up an image of association with exuding potentials but fragile moral and professional touch. The news feature achieves firmness with metaphoric language, associative images, allusions and juxtapositioning of evocative icons to present a general effect of concreteness of quality. Onifade interlaces the essay with poetic structures such as "It glides and fantasises like a dream in the slumbering imagination of the dreamer".²⁶

In his "Artists' Guild and the Crux of Professionalism", Onifade depicts the exhibition of the Guild of Professional Fine Artists of Nigeria (GFA), held at the Terra Kulture Nigerian Art Centre, Victoria Island, Lagos. In the news feature, he examines art activities, giving artistic illustration to it with the photograph of a painting of a female dancer captioned "Joy from within" by Edosa Ogiugo. Journalistic in form and language, the news story begins with introductory note to the exhibition. The next paragraph describes the exhibition as a classical parade of aesthetics and artistic ideology. The story reveals that the exhibition was to celebrate artistically Nigeria's 50th Independence Anniversary. The news story attempts to summarize the quality of the exhibition,

revolving around success and then the lessons to learn. It assesses the quality of membership of Guild of Professional Fine Artists of Nigeria (GFA) and Society of Nigerian Artists. It praises that of GFA and condemns that of SNA.

Onifade condemns the low artistic quality of graduates and traces it to their lecturers. Although, he makes some exemptions, but he asserts that these could not make any difference. He discloses the attitude towards the novelty match organized by the Lagos State Chapter of SNA for professional artists and those in academics. The writer makes a case for real professionalism. Finally, he advises the Society of Nigerian Artists to look into the criteria of membership and then makes some suggestions. The writer achieves compactness on theme and structure, weaving his ideas by selecting and arranging words and sentences that are models of a profession, which conveys budding but brittle professional texture. The news feature achieves coherence with associative images, allusions and juxtapositioning of evocative images to express concrete thematic effect.

The critic's ñKunle Filani: An Embodiment of Creative and Intellectual Ideologiesò in *KUNLE FILANI: Artist, Critic and Art Administrator*, edited by Ademuleya B.A., Onipede A.O. & Azeez W.A., characterizes Kunle Filani as an artist. Essay in form and content but stylistically a critique of Kunle Filani as artist and writer, it depicts the power of skillful deployment of words to create the model of a perfect artist and critic. It attains excellence in art discourses. The writer attempts to navigate through the labyrinth of artistic and critical experiences of a literary and an art giant, Kunle Filani, to establish his philosophical, psychological and ideological stance in different but related

ideas in an embodiment of creativity and intellectuality. The review admits in the first paragraph its limitations:

Writing a kaleidoscopic analysis on Kunle Filani at 50 may look so simple, but in truth, it is very complex. The character himself has a nature that seems ever simple, his appearance calm and admirable but his output is very complex.²⁷

The next paragraph reveals the nature of the critique, which it calls literary homage to a highly lettered personality. It declares its focus as the intellectual aspect of Filani but admits that it cannot avoid the artistic and creative input as exemplified in his many paintings, designs, drawings and printmaking. The essay reveals the demand with regard to paper publishing and the subtle entreaty but claims that Filani is good both in practice and in publishing. The writer discloses the artistic and literary contribution of Kunle whose works have prominently featured in many group and solo shows and that he has, over the years, engaged in the theory of art.

The author reveals Kunle's childhood background as against his achievement in adulthood that he was over-pampered to becoming an outright spoilt child. He attempts to make a case for his attainment at adulthood that it is the recurring image of Yeye in her ubiquitous wrappers made of Ofi that, in later years, culminated in Filani's knack for what he terms Vestigial Textures.²⁸ He characterizes Kunle's nature and his art. He asserts that Filani still wears innocent look that is humble and likeable. He adds that when he paints, he exhibits thematic depth, subtle colours that are brilliantly fused with equally flexible figures and that philosophically, he uses images that are often garnished with meaningful ideological forms and patterns.

The writer reveals Kunle's consistency in art practice, especially in "Best of Ife" and describes him further as steadfast, dogged as a dependable torchbearer, a rallying point to people and a forceful port of call in organization of group exhibitions and seminar/lecture. However, Onifade admits that Kunle is weak and attributes it to his inability to draw a line between a friend and a foe. He also associates to his weakness the failure of him and his founding colleagues to either re-emphasize or re-define the scope of "Best of Ife" in terms of membership qualification and the role of postgraduates of the Ife Art School. Finally, he discloses Filani's age and his friendliness to all. The essay achieves unity and coherence with metaphoric expressions, personification and associative images to establish an overall effect of density of thematic feels. The discreet choice of language to show meaning with economy of words is tact and thematically energizing: "To date, Filani still wears that innocent look of Omo Arugbo. He looks often unruffled with an air of Yeye's protective overbearing presence".²⁹

Onifade's "Why this Seminar?" in *When Does an Artist Become a Master?* Is seminar proceedings in form and content, but stylistically, a critical review of a phenomenon, master artist. It reveals that the seminar is a challenge to the psyche of artist, art writers, art teachers and art collectors and attempts to instill a form of consciousness in them. "Why this Seminar?" falls into the category of a critique in which the writer skillfully deploys words to play very significant role to attain provocative though. The writer attempts to navigate through the web of professional concepts and constructs in order to elicit flaws and correct phenomena in the art circle. In the first paragraph, the writer introduces the reader to the event of the day. The next paragraph reveals an award to a student, which was wrongly titled and thereafter it poses some

thought provoking questions. In the Introduction, he reveals some of the problems confronting artists. However, he declares that the problems are not peculiar to art. He gives example with The Guild of Nigeria Dancers, an umbrella body for dancers in Nigeria that after years of disillusionment, it eventually came up with an appellation that refers to professional dancers as Dance Artistes. The paper reveals the intellectual content of Ara Studio that will hold periodically and declaring that the topic is inevitable, it lists out the key speakers of a seminar that held on May 30, 2006.

Mufu Onifade's Language, Thought, Meaning and context of Utterance in Art Criticism

Writers have many intentions in their writing. Many have the intentions to crave a change of attitude in their reading audience by instilling some consciousness. They have a fixation with the task of developing their apparatus of communication. Fundamentally, Onifade's literary works are inherently a social force, ideologically employed to convert the reader in a most delightful or pleasurable manner with a serious message. He and necessarily other serious writers achieve this through aesthetic appeal. His art discourses specifically attempts to enhance public understanding and express his feeling about art activities. His works reveal that he considers this a very serious task. Onifade, therefore, establishes what a work of art should be, what the individual work is as a work of art. After establishing that, he proceeds to find a relationship between the two so that he can effectively take a sound critical position. Onifade's position provides readers with a way to understand and enjoy a work of art for its inherent value and thereby attain a new and positive awareness.

Evue's "The Writer with Power of Word: A Formalist Reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*" in *From Theory to Practice: Advanced Literary Tests Analysis*, Sotunsa Mobolande (ed.) supports Onifade's position in literary criticism. It reveals that the critic analyzes and critically appraises a work of art, particularly the literary process and the devices which the author uses to achieve literary effect.³⁰ He adds that the critic also examines critically the development of the writer's means of communication and sees the process was effectively carried out.³¹ By extension, Evue's assertion is valid to art discourses and visual art works. Writers and visual artists alike seek to achieve certain effects that are dictated by certain form (medium), which the critic determines whether is the best choice and whether the choice is successful.

Her *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* by Ann B. Dobie, also supports the position above. It reveals that formalism is popular with readers primarily because it provides readers with a way to understand and enjoy a work of art for its inherent value.³² She adds that formalism emphasizes close reading and focuses on the work.³³ By extension also, Dobie's assertion is valid to art discourses and visual art works. Now, having established formalist paradigm as the model for judging Onifade's literary works, the study attempts to establish his Language, Thought, Meaning and context of utterance in art criticism, which portend a style.

From the array of Onifade's works cited above, Onifade is unarguably an instrumentalist critic whose works have a social energy and ideological weaponry for attaining new and positive order. His ideological alignment is well established from the onset. He does not spare the artists, the works or the art events. He does this through strong critical language with clear meaning. If the artists or art events require praise, he

does it without reservation. On the contrary, if the artists or art events require condemnation for a short fall in standard, Onifade will not only condemn but he will suggest the way forward. When he offers his solution, well informed people will see the solution as the valid, measurable and good alternative.

The cited works so far reveal Onifade as well informed communicator with good command of English language, vernacular, Art History and research energy. His newspaper art discourses in particular reveal Onifade's strong ability of investigative art journalism with a knack for giving energy to his news story with illustrations. With such visual energy, his works effectively inform, remind and educate the reading public. He puts his thought to whatever he writes, ensuring that his messages are clear, topical and humanistically functional. He also expresses his thoughts to crave a change of attitude, instilling consciousness of professionalism with good deployment of words and sentences in art history and art appreciation. Onifade has a fixation with the task of developing his apparatus of communication, employing the ductility of language by using the formal elements of writing. Sometimes, he takes the form of prose or poetics or theatrics or a mix of them. This ability to juxtapose different forms of writing yet with clear meaning of words and sentences in the context of art gives his works a lucid creative process, which testifies to his versatility in some areas of visual arts.

Formal Elements of his Writing

Language is the universal and resourceful means to convey ideas. It may be seen as the expression of thought, the concretization or demonstration of thought. Language is the most powerful resources and continuum of humanity. It is the underlying force for concretization of developmental ideals. Very ductile, language is creative and dynamic

and that, by its ductile nature, humanity uses it for various purposes of communication. The particular way a person uses language becomes his language.³⁴ In this respect, this study identifies Onifade's language as instrumental; consequently, an instrumentalist critic, not in its cultural affinity but in its ductility. His language crusades for a reform not only on morality of the artist but also on his attitude to visual art. His language is pungent and portent, not to destroy but to elicit from the reader that potential that must be given some vent to achieve a concretization of ideal art both in practical and in theory. This is captured as a web in all his intellectual exercises, which he also displays in his *Ara* art.

Meaning is what a word or expression represents in the context of utterance.³⁵ It is the desire or actual thought/idea or a message the communicator intends to pass across to another through a medium. The one who sends the message expects a reaction accordingly. If this occurs then the meaning of such expression is understood in the context of utterance. Therefore, meaning, which must be built up from word meaning and sentence meaning, is the totality of communication. If thought is expressed through language, the meaning will be understood fully only if considered in the context of the utterance in which is made.³⁶ This underscores the importance of utterance in interpreting the meaning of words or expressions.

The overall context of the utterances of Mufu Onifade from the works above is social force to achieve a new order in art experiences. The overall context is found in expository/reviews which is very clear in his essays on art and artists contained in exhibition brochures, books and newspapers. His essays concerning art and artists seek to explain a process or technique and why he takes a particular position about something. His essays in newspapers inform, remind and educate the reading public with depth in the

knowledge of Art History, cultural language and the ductility of language, which get set the structure, tone and narrative technique from the beginning to the end. Onifade uses some common devices to achieve his language, thought, meaning and utterances in art criticism, such as structure, chronology, tone, characterization and narrative technique (dramatic monologue, epilogue).

The Technique of expressing Speech Sentence Structures in Poetic Form

An actor and playwright, Onifade uses his experiences to express speech sentence structures in poetic form. He uses this technique to bind his essays together to grip the reader as one listening to and watching the body language of a speaker. He deploys the device so energetically that it helps the reader to know the tone from the beginning. You read him addressing directly or indirectly invisible audience with concrete imageries: *Was he truly dead? When exactly did he die? What killed him? How authentic was the news?*³⁷ The structure of his choice of words is remarkably poetic. This is amplified with dramatic/poetic sentences intermittently in the body and conclusion of the essays. The title of his "The Mute of the beneficiary" is poetic. This is supported in the body of the essay with structures like "A few days later, a call from Kibar Alabi Garba of the Guardian sent us all out of the shell and chemistry of our bodies."³⁸ Addressing an invisible audience, he asks, "The news?" There are many of these examples not only in this essay but also in many others. He concludes this news article, "The Mute of the beneficiary", with "Why the mute? Anyway, this is a muse; away of mooring the muse of these beneficiaries in the hope that they wake up from their slumber."³⁹

"AGAN: The dreamer, the dream and the dreamed" also relies heavily on the technique of expressing speech sentence structures in poetic form. The title is

intrinsically poetic, serving as the signifier and the signified that immediately set the tone. In the body of the essay, Onifade energized the title with structures such as "It glides and fantasies like a dream in the slumbering imagination of the dreamer (col. 1, par. 1; p. 37)."⁴⁰ Another beautiful example is, "It was promoted by the dreamer (Musa) represented by the NGA, but handed over to the dreamed (private gallery operators) who are absolutely incapable of seeing the dream (continuous art expos) to fruition (col. 1, par. 1; p. 37)."⁴¹

Chronology

Onifade uses chronological development of materials as a strong device for deploying words to instill some consciousness. This serves as reminder and background to amplify the new message, recalling lost memories for a constructive attitude. This device is evident in all his writing but is given prominence in his "Ulli Beier: Unfulfilled dream of a true Africanist":

Ulli Beier was born in Germany to a German Jew father, a medical doctor by profession, in 1922. An art scholar of note, he came to Nigeria with Susanne Wenger, popularly known as Adunni Olorisa, in 1950: It was in the course of his artistic/scholarly sojourn in Nigeria that he had his first contact with Georgina who later became his wife. The meeting occurred between 1961 and 1962. Beier had been part of the Mbari Writers Club in Ibadan in the late 50s, which had provided a melting port for like minds in the literary circle.⁴²

This news feature, like most of his works, depends largely on chronology and sound knowledge of indigenous Art History to achieve density of texture in art journalism. Another attribute of Onifade revealed here in "Ulli Beier: Unfulfilled dream of a true Africanist" is his command of the use of formal elements, language, structure, repetition and unmistakable tone.

Tone

In all his writing, Mufu Onifade's tone is very clear. He establishes this from title through the body to the conclusion. The tone of regret/disappointment runs in many of his art discourses in news papers, such as in "Ulli Beier: Unfulfilled dream of a true Africanist":

The day broke last Sunday with the news of the death of Ulli Beier and "When a gallery destroys its progenitor's legacies: If Irein Wangbojeé were alive last Saturday, his name and tact administrative finesse for which he was known and respected would have rubbed off on a joint exhibition held in a gallery named after him."⁴³

In "Hellenistic Images: Nigerian artists in adulteration", here is Onifade's opening tone:

In their characteristic mannerism, some Nigerian artists beat their qualified, selected counterparts to a game of hustling in a quest to be part of a unique show, but ended up adulterating the whole process that also gave birth to a poor outing; and in "A competition without integrity: "Dear Colleagues, this is a solidarity call to all members to shun the LBHF painting competition as the organizers are unprofessional and disrespectful to artists." ⁴⁴

There are many more examples of tone of regret/disappointment. The tone of condemnation is also evident in some of his works such as "Shodaism: An unripe ism in Art Lexicon" and "In the Web of Plagiarism", among others.

Characterization

Mufu Onifade characterizes personalities and places very vividly. He dissects the character of persons involved in his news stories to a point that they seem to appear to the reader. He approves or condemns when necessary. This is the characteristic, among others, that make his art discourses controversial. His "IN THE WEB OF PLAGIARISM", "Shodaism: An unripe ism in Art Lexicon" and many others are good

examples. He does not even fail to give reason for his position. Lagos is his choice of place for art. This feat runs vividly in most of his writings. This excerpt from the second paragraph of ñUlli Beier: Unfulfilled dream of a true Africanistò captures Onifadeòs characterization of Beier thus:

When a man is too resourceful, his death naturally becomes doubtful. When received, it is with a wish that he still be alive and active like an energetic youngster. We all seemed to have temporarily forgotten that Ulli Beier wasn't a young man at all. At 88, with a life totally dedicated to, first and foremost, the theoretical and practical development of Nigerian Art, nothing can be more fulfilling.⁴⁵

Narrative Technique

Mufu Onifade develops his stories using narrative technique with dramatic monologue, epilogue, flashbacks and tropes. Signifiers and signified appear often. He combines all these writing deceives to achieve straightforward and simple writing. In fact, these devices portray Onifade as a versatile artist and writer.

Conclusively, the selected works in this chapter reveal Onifade first as a committed writer who combines knowledge of other aspects of the arts in writing. In fact, he writes with the ñbenefit of privileged information, accumulated experience, and often with academic knowledge as wellò.⁴⁶ The large volume of works leaves one wondering if he has time for pleasure. Secondly, the quality of journalistic textures in his works will make many conclude that he studied Journalism. Thirdly, the details in his works and the power of language displayed, stretching the ductility of language with compactness of textures, will also make many to conclude that Onifade studied English Language. However, Olusegun Jide Ajiboye, who has been following Onifadeòs works, will help with a better conclusion. In his ñThe Triangular Mufuò in *Whisper Araism: Mufu*

Onifade, Ajiboye reveals: "Viewing Mufu as a three-sided shape presents three planes; one plane presents Drama, another presents Art History and the last plane presents Arté" ⁴⁷ Mufu's critical side has been given vent by The Guardian Newspaper which gives regular space to Mufu's critical column called Artsessment. The public has been informed through his art reportage while criticism aimed at improving art and artists have been offered. Usually written in clear language, Artsessment has been very bold and uncompromising in giving praises or "knocks" as the case may be. Artsessment never fails to give "knocks" to some art schools (Onifade, 2008: 87) and never fears to air its opinion by thrashing the artisté" ⁴⁸

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CHAPTER EIGHT

BEYOND VISUAL ARTS

Mufu Onifade's versatility enjoys a reputation far wider than his age and circumstances would ordinarily suggest. He continues to be a major force in the growth of modern Nigerian art. In order to closely examine and present his versatility, the study attempts to look into some of his art exhibitions, art teaching, dramatic experiences, curatorship and art administration.

Onifade's Versatility: Art Exhibitions, Art Teaching, Dramatic Experiences, Curatorship and Art Administration

The Nigerian art scene has shown that it is not enough to work in one art medium, especially where an artist received his formal art training. Perhaps, this is because different concepts dictate the most suitable medium of expression, just as artists strive to respond appropriately to the sensory of materials. Asogwa's "Creative and Artistic Versatility in Modern Nigerian Art: A Study of Selected Artists to 2000" supports this position. It asserts, "no one art medium can provide the ample opportunity to fully express all his concepts," especially as "different artists are endowed with different creative and artistic talents" ¹ Onifade's art experiences develop in the line of Asogwa's assertion.

Onifade's artistic proficiency is profound and its development captivating, exhilarating and rewarding. His artistic prowess led to such versatility that no one art medium provides him with the opportunity fully to express himself. He is endowed with creative and artistic talents, especially in visual and performing arts. Onifade's versatility started early in life when he began to make strong artistic statements in his secondary

school education. First, an excursion into some of his exhibition experiences will enhance the understanding of Onifade's versatility in other areas of art. Immediately he completed his secondary school education, he exhibited his painting in *The World Seen Through the Eyes of Youth* organized by UNESCO in France in collaboration with the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture in 1985. He won a diploma certificate in this exhibition, which held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The diploma certificate urged him on to an unfolding versatile episode, which stimulus was derived from eventful early engagement in artistic tradition of his people. Straight away, his performance in *The World Seen Through the Eyes of Youth* exhibition coupled with his other artistic/cultural engagements at that time, facilitated his employment as a Visual Art Assistant at the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture.

With his success recorded in Paris and employment as a Visual Art Assistant, Onifade's achievements in exhibitions and performing art knew no bounds. He has many exhibitions in and outside the country. He had an exhibition in Austria held in May 1998 on the Mount of Vomperberg in Tyrol, Vienna as part of the activities marking what the organizers called *Afrika in Tyrol*. The exhibition curated by Mr. Olasehinde Odimayo, the Managing Director of Treasure House Gallery now located in Ikoyi, Nigeria, was a total cultural fiesta.

Onifade participated in an exhibition in Belgium, which was a cultural fiesta called *NEXPORTEX 2003* packaged by the International Diplomats Limited and held in Brussels in May 2003. He represented Ajibulu-Moniya Gallery on the fiesta with his works and some other Nigerian artists'. He had five major shows in the UK: First was the *16 pieces*, an exhibition of commissioned paintings organized for 16 artists from seven

countries sponsored by London Arts Board. The maiden show was held in September/October, 2001 in Chelsea. It has since been developed into a touring exhibition. The second show, his only joint show with Suzy Gillette, a British artist, was held in October 2001 at the Methodist Church Gallery in Chelsea. In the same year, he joined the National Society of Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers, UK. In November of the same year, he took part in *Made in Nigeria Goods Exhibition* held at the Wembley Stadium. His participation was on the bill of the Nigerian High Commission, U.K. under the Higher Commissionership of His Excellency, Prince Bola Ajibola.

In 2002, he participated in the 73rd edition of the annual exhibition of the National Society, U.K. The exhibition was held at the Westminster Gallery, London in October 2002. In 2004, he was in Harmony House, Dagenham and Barking in an exhibition titled *Dance of the Mask* involving 10 Nigerian artists including Bruce Onobrakpeya, Kolade Oshinowo, among others. He curated the show in collaboration with Nigerian High Commission and the British Government to celebrate African History Month in October 2004. He had experiences in the United States of America. In September 2008, he took part in the International Art Expo Las Vegas held in Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas. The show was graced by six Nigerian artists selected and sponsored by Nigerian Government courtesy of the National Gallery of Art led by its Director-General, Chief Joe Musa. Onifade has had a 3-month Residency Programme along with four other international artists at the Greatmore Art Studios, Cape Town, South Africa. The Painter was also involved in a combination of festivals by Thupelo International Artists and the Great Walk and More Artists held in Cape Town, South Africa. Indeed, the Residency was wrapped up with a 5-man exhibition titled *Ángaza*

Beyond visual art, Mufu Onifade has also made his mark, distinguishing himself as a genius. A man of many parts, he is a teacher, writer, essayist, critic, dancer, choreographer, actor, playwright, curator and painter. In each of these areas Onifade has exhibits remarkable talent. Outside exhibition, Onifade has been acknowledged as a versatile artist. Many writers have written on Onifade's versatility. Among them is Olusegun Jide Ajiboye who captures Onifade's versatility in some areas of art. In his "The Triangular Mufu" in *Whisper Arasim: Mufu Onifade*, Ajiboye characterizes Onifade's versatility as performer, Art Historian and Painter.² He reveals that Mufu's dramatic endeavors had taken him out of the country several times and that he has plays and prose to his credit. Among the plays and prose, according to him, are *Lami-lami* and *Love is blind* while *Nnambict's Curse* and *The Claims*. To prove Mufu's respected talent in the drama circle, Ajiboye reveals further that he (Mufu) became the Director of Publicity (2006-2009) of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, Lagos State Chapter and later became the chairman in 2009 till date. According to him, though Mufu's achievement as a dramatist is relevant and commendable, Ajiboye concludes that his side as an art historian is more relevant to the art circle.³

An informal teacher of great repute, Onifade continues to develop his teaching skill, which he began in his secondary school education. At this level of education, he, as a student, was appointed by the school authority to teach his schoolmates. Onifade's teaching skill in the Universal Studios of Art (Fig. 195) and Ara Studio is very remarkable. Universal Studios of Art organizes regular studies to regular students and non-regular students who come from other higher institutions of learning on Industrial Training. Though the curriculum is developed in line with university and polytechnic

training, emphasis in teaching is on practical. The structure and content of the studio in itself enhance training. First, the environment offers itself as a solution to many challenges that are in tertiary education. Many studio artists, including Onifade of great repute, whose work experiences offer practical example to learners, are on the job everyday. Secondly, all the resident artists, including Onifade, engage in constant group and solo exhibitions of international standard. The exhibitions offer what is lacking in other schools.

The report by Tajudeen Sowole for the Guardian, carries the caption, "An appraisal of the last 50 years of art has portrayed the Universal Studios of Art, Lagos as a bridge between art trainings – formal or informal – and the mainstream practice".⁴ It reveals that close to three decades, about fifty students from the higher institutions of learning in the country receive yearly more training as industrial trainees in the Universal Studios. The report adds that those who do not have formal training receive training in the various areas of the visual arts in the studios, which started in 1980.⁵ Onifade who teaches some courses in Universal Studios of Art, is the secretary and he curates some of the exhibitions.

The photograph, *Universal Studios of Art* (Fig. 195) is a clear picture of the studio where Onifade carries out his informal teaching. The block of studios also contains classroom and an open space for outdoor painting, drawing, teaching and environmental sculpture. The block offers a crop of artists of different shades whose studio experiences help to balance up the classroom teaching. It is here Onifade offers his practical and theoretical experiences to the students. In an interview, Onifade remarks that there is a shortfall in the teaching of visual art in secondary schools and that this has led to poor

performance of students in his class. He regretted that most secondary schools do not offer visual art any more. He revealed that the scarcity of art students in the higher institution of higher learning has also affected the number of students on training in his classroom. Other artists in the *Universal Studios of Art* also supported this position.



Fig. 195: Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, 120 cm x 60 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

Onifade teaches art in his Ara Studio, using both formal and informal methods. He has taught Ara art to many students, including Ara disciples. In the photograph, *Teaching in Progress at Ara Art Studios* (Fig. 196) Onifade demonstrates teaching of Ara art technique. Here, the lady applies the colour hues with the palette knife while he watches and guides. The photograph reveals further the manner of painting on a flat surface.



Fig. 196: *Teaching in progress at Ara Studio, Lagos*, 120 cm x 56 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

Mufu Onifade's art teaching flies decisively on the wings of creative success and sails vigorously on professional experiences beyond Universal Studios of Art and Ara Art Studios in the country to South Africa where he taught Ara art to many artists. These artists came from different parts of the world. The photograph, *Teaching in progress, South Africa* (Fig. 197) captures aptly the moment of Ara art teaching in a most commitment of purpose, realistic appraisal and decisive judgment on the part of the teacher. The international students/artists are not less committed. Onifade here continues the wave of artistic surprises and creative challenges, which are identified with *Ara* art but which traditional African sculptures started in Europe, particularly in the 19th century.



Fig. 197: *Teaching in progress, South Africa*, 120 cm x 65 cm, 2012.
©Mufu Onifade.

The artist/teacher was able to show his talent here by marrying traditional art with academic art in Yoruba cultural and conceptual idiom. Using the demonstrative method of teaching art, Onifade characteristically makes the learners go through Ara art technique and style in poetic idiom in the light of lines and hues, values and intensity of colour. The photograph, *The Araism Teacher and Artists/Students* (Fig. 198) captures the happy mood of the artists after a successful artistic teaching and learning sessions.



Fig. 198: *The Araism Teacher and Artists/Students*, S. Africa, 122 cm x 70 cm, 2012.
© Mufu Onifade.

The letter of confirmation by Kate Tarratt Cross, Director, Greatmore Art Studios, Cape Town, South Africa, dated 27th July, 2010, captures it all:

To whom it may concern,

This letter serves to confirm that MUFU ONIFADE has completed a 3-month Visiting Artist Residency at Greatmore Studios, Woodstock, Cape Town. During his time at Greatmore, Mufu shared his knowledge and skills with 4 other International Artists, 8 Local Artists and 25 Thupelo Artists... He completed an outreach programme, participated in the Great Walk and More Festival and showcased his work in the visiting artist exhibition, 'ANGAZA¹', which opened to over 80 spectators on the 22nd July 2010.

It has been a great pleasure having Mufu's presence in the studio. He has made a great contribution to the local art scene and Woodstock community.

I wish him the very best for any future endeavors and hope that he settles back in his home where I'm sure he has been missed.

Signed

Kate Tarratt Cross (2010), Director.⁶

(Whisper Araism: Mufu Araism, p. 10)

Mufu Onifade began to participate in the traditional dances of his people early in life. This skill soon transformed into a career and developed into choreography. His dancing and choreographing career started in Lagos when he joined the State Council for Arts and Culture performing group called Lagos State Standing Troupe as a performing artist. He was a utility artist, who was comfortable in practice as visual artist, writer, actor, drummer, dancer and, later, a choreographer. A dancer and a choreographer of great repute, Onifade introduced innovations into the troupe. He created movements and patterns of dance composition that earned the troupe an enviable place among other troupes. He was deeply involved in creating dance stories and set design. This remains a standard with the troupe. He introduced techniques and movements of dance idiom to dance forms based on Yoruba historical and cultural styles to express moods, emotions and ideas, which tell a story of religious, political, economic or needs of the people. This earned the troupe the "Golden Era". The troupe travelled to many states in Nigeria. The troupe toured the United States in 1986 to achieve the Golden Era for the council.

Beyond the Lagos State Standing Troupe, which he resigned from, Onifade owns a dance troupe called The Crown Troupe of Nigeria. This troupe entertained guests in the opening ceremony of the launching of the first exhibition of Ara. The brainchild of Onifade, the troupe has continued to entertain great personalities in the country.



Fig. 199: *Love is Blind on stage*, 120 cm x 40 cm, 2007.
© Mufu Onifade.

Mufu Onifade also started informal acting with his people when he participated in the activities of Egungu festival, taking part in *Ijala* and Iromoje tonal chanting. This acting skill, which Onifade started in a modest manner, has also transformed into a career and developed into play writing. Onifade has also made a mark as playwright and actor.

He has written many successful plays especially for stage. Onifade's dramatic efforts had made him to travel to other countries several times for his plays and prose. Among the plays are *Lami-lami* and *Love is blind*. The *Love is Blind* (Fig. 199), a satire, by Onifade, addresses the moral decay in Nigerian society.

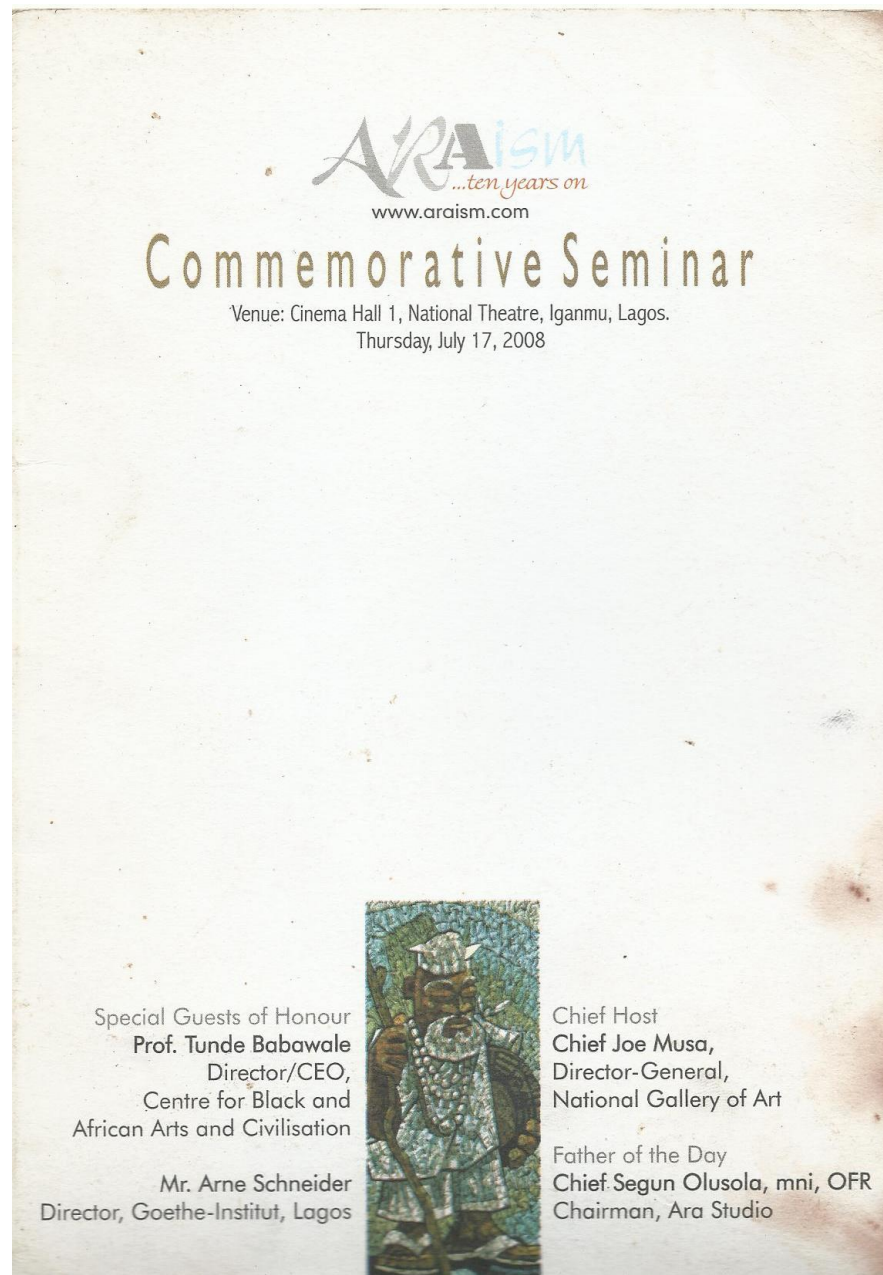
The work is a play in form and content, but stylistically, it is a narrative. Onifade finds play and novel the most convenient canvases by which he weaves the art of storytelling to express adequately communal reality. *Love is blind* was first put on stage at the University of Lagos in 2004 and repeated in the National Theatre, Iganmu in 2006. Some of his novels are *Nnamdi's Curse* and *The Claims*. These novels, including the plays enjoy good patronage and readership.

For his respected talent in drama and administration, he became the Director of Publicity (2006-2009) of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, Lagos State Chapter. Since 2009, he has been the chairman of the chapter. This administrative office also reveals his managerial capability. He was recently appointed Special Assistant on Media to the Director General of the National Gallery of Art (NGA). Not long, perhaps, on his recognition for hard work, he was promoted Deputy Director.

Onifade is recognized for his great curatorial capability and dexterity in convening seminars and art exhibitions. He was a curator in Ajibulu Moniya Gallery, Lagos, where he made a mark. He curated many successful exhibitions. In this gallery, Onifade combined his curatorship with executing commissions on animal skin painting for Ajibulu Moniya Gallery. Indeed, he has painted no fewer than thirty-five portraits of personalities on animal skin on commission. Among the exhibitions he curated

remarkably are the series of *Best of Ife*. He also played active part in organizing the seminars that related to *Best of Ife*.

Mufu Onifade clearly displays his ability to organize successful seminars with art provocative themes through his Ara Studio. He pulls eminent discussants from all walks of life who provide intellectual context for understanding the tradition of African creativity and aesthetics. Having been a columnist in some Nigerian newspapers as well as practicing art for more than two decades now he has become familiar with the tradition of African creativity and aesthetics and laments what can be regarded as its shoddy nature. His journalistic writings are outcry against his disappointment in the Nigerian art experiences and call for a new order. His organized seminars also grow out of and respond to the same context and pressure. His "Commemorative Seminar" (Doc. 1) was very successful in this regard. Doc. 1. is a great signifier to some of the intellectuals and eminent men that dissect his provocative themes. Some other seminars he organized through Ara Studio and National Gallery of Art include "Araism: African Ideals and Authenticity of Creativity in Contemporary Nigerian Art" in 2008. Earlier in 2006, Ara Studio and National Gallery of Art had organized a great seminar with another provocative theme, "When does an Artist become a Master?". Mufu Onifade edited and published the proceedings of this seminar with the title, *When does an Artist become a Master?(Seminar Proceedings)*. The proceedings raised a number of issues bordering on the construct, "Master artist". His role does not start and end with organizing the seminars. He discusses with equal intellectual and creative competence. His discussions grow out of the benefit of deep information, a reservoir of experience and academic energy to attain grandeur.



Doc. 1: *Araism Seminar*, 125 cm x 70 cm, 2008.
© Mufu Onifade.

A short review of the edited proceedings will illuminate the construct, ñMaster artistò, and closely present Mufu Onifade as a versatile artist. The ñSeminar Doseò by Grillo, reveals that the term ñMasterò in visual arts is vague and lends itself to arbitrary application. It traces the history of Master/disciple/apprentice system, like that of Mufu

Onifade, to the period pre-Renaissance in which the term "masterpiece" rose. It searches for criteria for mastership, but finding none; the paper makes some revelations, asks some pertinent questions, casting doubt in the possibility of having a system to provide the criteria and suggests an academy to do it.⁷

Ohiomokhare's paper characterizes a master artist as one, like Mufu Onifade, who makes a mark through a guiding vision, shapes shared values and provides leadership for the people with whom he works. To address the subject, the paper gives ten conditions for an artist to become a master.⁸ Onobrakpeya also characterizes a master artist as a role model. The paper describes Grillo, like Mufu Onifade, as role model for his humility, correctness of character and devotion to the arts. It adds that he is a teacher of many generations consuming his expertise, knowledge and ability to teach, impart and inspire people together and that these easily classify him within the roles called a master.⁹ Buhari describes a master artist as one, like Mufu Onifade, who is recognized on the field. However, he asks rhetorically who qualifies to call somebody a master, adding, "We live in a country where lefties are renovated and that is why I think this is one of the reasons why this topic is very important".¹⁰ Layiwola characterizes a master artist as one having "the ability to create a departure from the norm or existing theories (like Mufu Onifade has done)" in other words, there is a shift from what already exists; by that the master stands above a general group of artists.¹¹

In his contribution from the floor, Nnabuike asserts that the public makes an artist a master(as the public has acknowledged Onifade), that art strives on reviews and that the public understands an artist through reviews.¹² Omoighe generalizes the characters of a master to be selfless, cheerful givers of all they possess tangible or intangible assets, that

he must be intellectually, physically and spiritually wealthy and that from this he becomes a channel for God to reach all of life (as attributes of Mufu Onifade).¹³ Oditia reveals that a master should (1) have art forms that must have visibly improved over a long period of time, with the most recent being the most outstanding; (2) know that a master must know that the status of a master artist is often achieved through practice and determination, the drive to repeat something over and over until it reaches near perfections¹⁴, enlightening the certainty that a capability is only as good as its executive; (3) must recognize that an artist, who is different from other artists, individualistic and created a new way of looking at the world thereby influencing his society, is a master; and (4) must be cognizant of the fact that a master artist is someone who is highly skilled and able to execute the technique above and beyond the norm (description which fits Mufu Onifade).¹⁵ Ikpakronyi discloses that a master (artist) is someone, like Mufu Onifade, who is creative in idea as well as production, competent in producing his idea, an expert in the production of his works. He adds that the master must be an apprentice at a time and must train others.¹⁶

Now the reviews provide ground for assessing Mufu Onifade whether or not he has become a master and at what time. Mufu Onifade has a character, which defines him to the public as upright, creatively consistent with great love for professionalism. He is uncompromising with substandard art forms and art events. His position in any art event is well defined. In character and creativity, he has become a role model to young and old, professional and none professional. His humility, correctness of character and devotion to the arts has placed him in an enviable position in the comity of nation. He has become a

teacher to many who count on his expertise, knowledge and ability to teach, impart and inspire them.

That Mufu Onifade is intellectually, physically and spiritually wealthy and that from this he has become a channel for dissemination of the theory and practice of art is no longer in doubt. He is creative in ideas and production. He is a well-known convener of seminars, a curator of high standing, a great critical mind in the arts, a columnist of newspapers and magazines, a playwright, actor, essayist, dancer and a reviewer of many art exhibitions. Of course, he was an apprentice at a time and has been training others.

Mufu Onifade has an art form, *Ara* art, which has visibly improved over a long period, with his most recent paintings being the most outstanding. He achieved *Ara* art through practice and determination with the drive to work repeatedly on until it has reached near perfection. He has recognized that an artist must be different from others, must be individualistic and must create a new way of looking at the world thereby influencing his society. He has acquired this status with verve by using *Ara* to interpret the world through Yoruba culture. In deed, he is highly skilled and he is able to execute some art forms beyond the norms through *Ara* technique, which started as a combination of textile, graphics and painting but with time narrowed itself to only painting that breaks the convention of painting tools and processes. Today no one is in doubt with *Ara* as an authentic African technique originated and exposed by Mufu Onifade. The argument about *Ara* as an offshoot of *Ona* has never strayed to *Ara*'s uniqueness.

In fact, Onifade has created a departure from the norm or existing theories, in other words, his painting has shifted from what already exists, which makes him stand above other artists. He has made a mark through a guiding vision, *Ara* art and *Ara*

Studios, thereby shaping shared values and providing leadership for the people with whom he associates. His art and critical contribution to art have been striving on reviews through which the public has understood him better.

Indeed, the period Onifade excelled in animal skin painting, graduated best art student, wrote many reviews and made critical contributions to newspapers and magazines, wrote plays and acted plays, danced and choreographed dances he was not a master. At the point Onifade's Ara art was believed, accepted, practised by a group of other artists and his name became a household name by Ara art he began to fulfil the above conditions enumerated. At that point, 2006 when he and his disciples launched Araism, the public made him a master artist, his art striving on reviews through which the public understands him better. Today, Mufu Onifade is still riding on public reviews and acceptance and his reputation growing internationally, he is a master artist, a living legend.

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CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

The research makes various studies to establish the creativity, professionalism and functionality in the works of Mufu Onifade, from 1992 to 2012. In this direction, the study examines the functional nature of Onifade's art forms, themes, African aesthetics and colour idiom of his Araism, including those of his *Ara* art disciples. The study also discusses the functional nature and the power of deployment of words to achieve narrative grandeur in Onifade's art discourses. In this vein, the research evaluates some of the linguistic tools, which account for the structure of his art essays/reviews and art journalism.

Research in modern Nigerian art focus much on the pioneer modern Nigerian artists to the point that the budding ones are seemingly forgotten. Meanwhile, some of these budding artists are endowed with excellent creativity and dynamic versatility in some areas of visual arts and have not been acknowledged and documented. A good example is Mufu Onifade, who has a unique experimental art style and critical art discourses that scholars through researches have not exposed. There is no doubt that many Nigerian newspapers, magazines and exhibition catalogues have featured this artist, but the essays on him are vague and not academic. The research, therefore, finds the need to study thoroughly this artist's creativity, professionalism and functionality in his works, from 1992 to 2012 with academic textures.

The study uses as a guide historical research method and employs primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources include oral interview with the artist, his professional colleagues, his *Ara* art disciples and his former teachers. The

researcher conducts interviews with the aid of a camera and a tape recorder. The primary sources also include documents such as diaries, photographs, letters and personal observations of Ara art activities. The secondary sources include books, journals, exhibition catalogues, student's projects, seminar papers and proposals as well as newspapers and magazines found in libraries of tertiary institutions and private holdings.

To drive the research, some specific objectives were set up as a framework. They are (1) to examine Onifade's biographic background; (2) to study his Araism movement thematically and stylistically; (3) to locate the indigenous nature of his motifs; (4) to examine the colour influence on his followers; (5) to present the factors that make him versatile; (6) to discuss his contribution to art criticism in Nigeria and (7) to examine how his works and critical writings are humanistically functional.

The study establishes the findings on the objectives. Onifade hails from a traditional setting, which has a high artistic tradition that forms the bedrock of his fascinating and exhilarating creative ingenuity. The study ascertains the theme of Yoruba worldview, especially culture, affection and secular views. Onifade achieves these in the capacity reflected in the 'Triangular Mufu' in *Whisper Araism: Mufu Onifade*. Ajiboye uses 'Triangular Mufu' to characterize Onifade as a growing tree and a three-sided artist as thus:

Among the many artists on the contemporary Nigerian art landscape, Mufu Onifade is one of the growing trees with deep roots and steady growth that portends a future giant. Mufu can be compared to a three-sided form with a base.¹

The study establishes traditional musical instruments, masks, masquerades, dress code, ornaments, gun, axe, folklore, charms and expressive lines, using Yoruba

traditional woodcarving style of expression. The study establishes a colour scheme of green, red and blue that runs dominantly through Araism. The study ascertains Onifade as a painter, curator, choreographer, dancer, dramatist, playwright and teacher. The study establishes his style of art criticism as instrumentalist and that his art criticism has raised the standard of art practice, art education and art discourses in modern Nigerian art. The study establishes the high standard his *Ara* art and critical writings have created in modern Nigerian art. The works successfully crusade against sub-standard art practice, plagiarism, shoddy exhibitions, art theft and sharp practices in the organization of art activities, all of which form the crux of his thematic parlance. His works, therefore, humanistically generate great concern and influence art professionalization in modern Nigeria art.

The study agrees to Onifade's description of his three-sidedness as members of the public characterize him. However, the study focuses on two aspects of Onifade: artist and art critic. For the description as an artist, the study establishes that Onifade's *Ara* art style emanated from a unique and uncommon conventional technique of painting that has taken creative excellence and African aesthetics to a very great height. Araism that is gaining large discipleship has a strong voice in modern Nigerian art and beyond. Araism legitimizes the culture of its people, establishes itself as revolutionary, a socio-cultural crusader and an instrument for positive change. The study further establishes that *Ara* art style acquired the status of Araism, which has two connotations: a style of art and a movement; when some people began to believe and practice its style and ideology. Having assumed this status, the exponent and his first set of *Ara* art disciples launched

Ara arts and Araism Movement with an exhibition in 2006. At this point, Olaku captures Araism with his ñMatter Araismò in *Araism Movement 5* and characterizes Onifade thus:

é This Movement, idea or ideology (as you might want to tag it) has been so efficiently and purposefully sold to the public in such a way that at the mere mention of ARA or ARAISM, a name automatically engages you: MUFU ONIFADE. Biigbinbafa, ikarahun a telee.²

The vernacular needs translation for its significance. Literary translation: the snail moves with its house; Mufu Onifade, the symbolic snail and his Ara art disciples the symbolic house, which moves with him. The technique is a strict combination of graphics, textile and painting processes to make Ara art. Many people, amongst who is Filani who captures the technique very well. In his ñForging Ahead with Ara Identityò in *Araism Movement 2*, Filani describes the graphics aspect of Ara art: *Mufu Onifade's unique way of creating images on canvas is an extension and a further fragmentation of what the graphicsts call faceting.*³

Ideationally and stylistically, Araism is unique. It does not take its root, as it is wrongly alleged, from Onaism or any other art movement. They may share from the same ideology of re-enacting the Yoruba culture and high artistic tradition, but their technical modes of execution are quite different and unique. Araism and any other art movement may lay claim to the juxtaposition of African worldview with academic art, using colours. The difference is in the technique which results into the overall form/structure that sums up the style. Again, Olaku uses ñMatter Araismò in *Araism Movement 5* aptly to characterize the quality of *Ara* art and concludes by describing the technical and nature of the design, which, indeed, identifies and defines the dissimilarity whether or not there is similarity:

é The notable attributes of these works include depth of rich philosophy, especially within the spiritual quarters of Yoruba culture and tradition as well as technical eloquence and command of design.⁴

Fundamentally, *Ara* art preserves and disseminates Yoruba worldview and, as a weapon of reform and a social force, seeks to achieve a new order, using forms and colours articulated in an emotional, symbolic, intellectual and spiritual manner for a new world. It shows the duty of wakening the Yoruba community to ethical and religious values with works of art. Stylistically, he sometimes uses woodcarving sub-style with forms that are aesthetically in staccato or abrupt transition, delineated sections, circular and angular straps as planes of reference. This gives the illusion of 3-dimensionality in a 2-dimensional space, thereby creating a fascinating feel of sculpture. He also uses the painterly approach in an overall *Ara* art style, *Araism*, which shows forms that are relaxed in smooth transition. Very revealing is the painstaking nature, strong and humanly themes, which aesthetically provide the satisfaction that a work of art can yield with meanings. The works are structurally expressive but instrumental in content to communicate ideas and feelings very vividly.

On Onifade's description as a critic, the study establishes Onifade as instrumentalist art critic with an intellectual depth of the knowledge of Art History, good command of language and commitment to one's faith. He uses art discourses as a social force and an ideological weapon, attempting to proffer standard as the watchword in modern Nigerian art. His works reveal the relevance of art appreciation to society with a drive that art appreciation is deeply rooted in society and, therefore, deals with characters and situations taken from it. He uses two styles with equal competence: expository style of expression and art journalistic writing, seeking to keep the rules of writing but with

some peculiarities that help to define his style. ñTriangular Mufuò in *Whisper Araism: Mufu Onifade* by Ajiboye characterizes Onifade's nature of art criticism thereby revealing it as instrumentality:

*The public has been informed through his art reportage while criticism aimed at improving art and artists have been offered.*⁵

Onifade's qualities as a good speaker, actor and playwright are clear in his writing even in Art History and art journalism. He sets the tone from the beginning with a command of the use of formal elements ñ language, structure and repetition. He addresses directly or indirectly invisible audience with concrete imageries. The word structure of most of his titles is poetic. He amplifies with poetic sentences intermittently in the body and conclusion of his writings. Mufu Onifade characterizes personalities and places. He approves the good and condemns the bad. He gives reasons for his action. In this manner, Onifade's critical writings have positively affected humanity. Like his *Araism*, Onifade's critical art writings are clearly a weapon of reform and a social force, seeking to achieve a new order. Conclusively, the research proves the academic energy in the study of the creativity, professionalism and functionality in the works of Mufu Onifade, from 1992 to 2012.

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