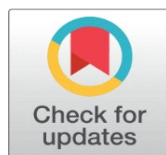


WASTE PHENOMENOLOGY IN NIGERIA'S POSTMODERN ART

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ABSTRACT

Globally, the paradigm shift from modern to postmodern art is actively traceable to the 1970s. This shift is known as postmodernism, a movement that embraces limitless enquiry in art, exemplified in “mass culture”; that is synthesis from any and every materials including waste. In Nigeria, this shift emerges in 2000, which became active and clearer in 2003 with Uche Onyishi’s “Ants” masterfully rendered from calabash, cup and wire wastes. Today the surge of wastes appearance in art is phenomenal, instance in plastic, rubber, paper, wires, metal, fabric, glass, woods and etcetera. Practical and technical as the efforts of these artists were at waste to art, it is sad to note that their contributions have not been given commensurate and adequate scholastic attention and publicity. It is on this premise that the study attempts analytical examination of works by selected Nigerian artists. Shortlisted are eight (8) works, Wealth of Nation: Ogoni Nine, Okirika Bale, On the Waterfront, Environment and Object, Root Desecrated, Let’s Turn Time on the Table and Scrap of Evidence, executed between 2007 and 2020. Finding attest pieces phenomenal wastes acculturation, a postmodernist willingness in embracing “mass culture” as against modernist “high art”[1] in Nigerian art. It further reveals artists none proclamation or affirmation of postmodernism, largely for lack of theory and philosophy. The study therefore confers postmodernist or postmodernism on these art practitioners. Conclusively, its findings is hoped to further provoke documentations on waste, art and practice phenomenology from postmodernist standpoint in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Keywords:



1. INTRODUCTION

Waste, to a very large extent is an inevitable integral of human activities, it is any discarded substance, usually unavailing after primary use [2]. Odicha, defines it as instantaneous worthless substances, which often find usefulness as raw material elsewhere [3]. It is solid, liquid and gaseous in nature often typified as municipal solid wastes (MSW) and environmental impact wastes (EIW). Environmental impact wastes play host to hazardous waste and non-hazardous waste [4, 5]. Municipal solid wastes on the other hand are house hold, domestic, industrial, agricultural, demolition, construction and mining wastes [5]. In Akinyemi’s [7] view, Nigeria has inherited a waste culture, particularly from the West, creating somewhat invasion, disruption and disorientation of traditional principles of cleanliness, health and care of an average household. It incessant public menace, apparent in major towns and cities of Nigeria, is fast becoming phenomenal where their myriad abounds all year round [8].

The inadequate facilities to recycle these wastes require universally holistic resolution on solid waste management [2, 9]. Few of the notable works on wastes recycle are Cheremisinoff [10], Chadha [11], Oderinde [12], Alamu [13], Akinde [14], Akinde [15], Kalilu and Akinde [16], Akinde and Kalilu [17], Kalilu, Akinde and Atuh [18]. Today, wastes

management can be likened to a work in progress with acclaimed and increasing improvement across the globe, as its producers are willing to pay when payment is required [19]. This development is by no means responsible for the adoption of wastes vital and veritable in art and in particular Nigerian postmodernism [7, 20]. It is however, apt to note that postmodernism started as a movement in Europe and America as a reaction against the modernist critics of the mid-twentieth century, which inevitably and actively took place between 1950 and 1970 till present [21, 1]. Postmodernism, simply put, is the disjunction and discontinuity between the old and the new.

It is a collision of competing cultures of an almost incomprehensible diversity and range, which is far beyond organic or geometric arrangements [22]. To put it in a clearer term, postmodernism is the willingness to incorporate anything and everything into a given artistic design [1]. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Browne argues that modernist emphasis on formal beauty is narcissistic [21]. In their opinion formalist analysis adjudges work of art as genuine, pure and self sufficient, without credence to societal or cultural context. To their mind, such submissions are all dressed up with nowhere to go [21]. Their attempt was a break away from modernist forms which had inevitably become conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist "high art" by recourse to the models of "mass culture", exemplified in film, television, newspaper cartoons and popular music [1, 23]. In Nigeria postmodernism can be traced to year 2000 [24, 25, 26, 27], the era noted for re-invigoration of creative consciousness among artists.

Their radical tendencies at experimenting and synthesizing with anything and everything became more apparent in the later years. They paradoxically combines household waste objects or utensils in their art, imitating painting compositional technique. This characteristic feature in postmodernism according to Stokstad [28] is determined by the need to alter art tradition with something by creating an unusual environment, resort to allegorical language, classic rebirth and freedom. Akinyemi [7], analysis diverse artworks of Nigerian artists and explores how their works of art became vehicles for the postmodern inquiry and submits that, for the artists to cope with what they see as the chaos or altered identities, they would try to anchor what they see as stable artworks. According to Hutcheon [29] Nigerian art postmodernism began as a pluralist cultural form where artistic practices increased rapidly without any agreed goals, ultimately opposing earlier stances as a result of no dialectics breeding. Exploring new ways of expression characterized postmodernist art, giving rise to limitless synthetic opportunities [30, 31].

A view Andrea Zittel observes thus;

Every single person's yard is landscaped to represent some fantasy of where they live, whether it be an alpine fantasy or a tropical fantasy or desert fantasy. And they are all totally separate little universes or environment that are completely honed in. So I have been thinking about how I could actually create a design for a feasible living environment that reflects capsule living and how its more and more about creating your own bubble, your own capsule [22].

The above narrative can be likened to why Uche Onyishi adopted calabashes, cups and wire to produce pool of over one hundred and fifty (150) soldier ants [32]. He composed them very creatively, leading visitor into El Anatsui's Promoters of Nigerian art exhibition hall at the Goethe Institute, Lagos in 2003 [32]. His exhibit a pointer to postmodernist waste adoption, which to a large extent led to it phenomenology in Nigerian art scene in later years. Apparent among such synthetic creations are cheap local and foreign materials like scrap wood, plastics, metal, glass, rubber, paper and fabrics. To discuss this phenomenon, eight (8) artists with postmodern artistic tendencies were shortlisted and critically examined based on media, theme, context and conception. These works ranges from installations, photography and painting, produced between 2007 and 2020 (plates 1-8).



Plate 1

Victor Ehikamenor, 2007, *Wealth of Nation: Ogoni Nine*, particle boards, empty chemical drums, bathtub and line wastes, Artist's Archive.

This piece titled “Wealth of Nation: Ogoni Nine” is an installation art, executed in 2007. The piece was rendered in multi-media by Victor Ehikamenor, a writer, photographer and painter, who hails from Udomi-Uwessan, Delta State, Nigeria [33]. Visually, the piece is a cuboidal construct, made from possibly particle boards; it houses empty chemical drums, bathtub and fishing lines. The background surface of the cubicle and that of the bathtub were chromed in yellow patination and complimented with black doodling, which gives the illusion of faces. This structural construct plays host to nine chemical drums, suspended with fishing lines at divergent heights and distance above a ceramic bathtub. The metal drums were treated in red background with continuous black doodling on each with centrally and boldly impressed word, OIL in white hue. The signification of the suspended drums is death by hanging, while the yellow, white and red chromes signify peaceful dawn that turns bloody. The doodling can be likened to Nsibidic writings [34]. Its black colouration is a pointer to the race Negro origin and location, while the red on the inner surface of the tub signifies the bloody nature of the scene.

Thematically, the piece is radical and political. Its conception was built around the incident that took place in Ogoni land, an oil producing community of Nigeria by a group of nine activist whose advocacy was against oil spillage in the area [35](Wikipedia, 2020). Their action was allegedly linked with the death of four notable Ogoni chiefs by the then Military government. They were arrested, arraigned and unjustly executed in 1995. The order was frowned at by many Nigerians and the United Nations (UN), both saw the execution of the nine as genocidal.



Plate 2

Victoria-Idongesit Udondian, 2011, *Okirika Bale*, Foreign used cloths (gowns, blouses, shirts and pants) Glaze tiles, Burnt bricks and Cavas, Variable Dimension, Artist's Archive

Okirika Bale, (plate 2) is an installation art rendered by Victoria-Idongesit Udondia in the year 2011. Udondian is a Nigerian sculptor and new genres with interest in textile and its potentialities in shaping human identity and history [36]. Her work, *Okirika Bale* is an inanimate installation of clothing displayed at the corridor of a gallery. The piece had array of newly imported foreign wears of diverse shapes, sizes, colours and texture. They are known as new arrival in local parlance, often of different grades quality, instance in grade A/1 to D/4 or thereabout. Total of six bales were apparently evident in their array, positioned in orderly manner. These bales of cloths are seen ascending a staircase from the ground floor to possibly the first floor where their dealer's shop or storeroom is situated. Apart from the staircase, there are two other door openings to two storerooms, both adorn in white hue. The gallery was constructed with burnt brick and reinforced with plastered concrete pillars and beams. Its floor is paved in glazed tile, giving a super shine finishing, while its brick wall is ornamented with two paintings, on canvas; one on the near left and the other on the rear left. Of the two paintings only the near left is visible for visualisation [37]. It is a self portrait of a black damsel, adorn in spotless white gown. She is seen descending an open staircase, somewhere in Europe, supposedly France.

The staircase suggest the unknown, keeping in mind its dark and open states. While the doors signify liberation, a place of freedom and unbundling in all its ramification. Equally, the bricks, tiles and concrete attests solidity. Each of the

bales had been compressed, fastened and crisscrossed in white straps, each weighing about one hundred and fifty kilogram (150 kg), housing corporate and casuals gowns, blouses, shirts, pans and the likes. The bales literary and conceptually, can be likened to human sporting limits. The level of progress made by each to freedom or finish line, attesting global social, political and economical inequalities. In this race, the white bale is seen taken the lead. Although, black plays a prominent role in the event, but still at the back burner. It is a situation that can be likened to the apparent and subtle infiltration by other shades like red, brown, gray, grayish blue, green, brown and white in the black bales. Thematically, this piece attests Western waste colonialism as identified in Nigeria and in extension Africa.



Plate 3

George Osodi, 2015, *On the Waterfront*, Plastic water bottle, Plastic Bags, Nylons, Transparent plastics, Disposable plates, Leather bags, Wigs and Broken ceramics, Artist's Archive.

George Osodi is a graduate of Business Administration at Yaba College of Technology, Lagos and London Academy of Media, Film and Television Graphics [38]. Though known as a photo journalist, he would equally be described as an environmental photographer. His work titled "On the Waterfront" is an animated performance art of lesser animal, cattle to be precise [39]. The piece exhibited in 2015 can be likened to one in a hundred shots. The photograph was snapped at an urban poor community, somewhere in Lagos, Nigeria. This piece gives a vivid account of a community life in wastes at the heart of Lagos, Nigeria. The waste ranges from house hold, domestic, industrial, agricultural, demolition, construction to mining wastes. Nylons, transparent plastic, disposable plates, leather bags, wigs and broken ceramics, supposedly constitute the prevalent waterfront. Other waste materials are facial board, planks, roofing metal sheets and rods of diverse sizes and shapes, used in the construction of the residences.

The piece is subdivided into foreground, middle and background. It's background has make shift structures of nine houses and one kiosk, built with used planks, facial boards, flex and metal roofing sheets. Also at the background are two projectiles, a telecommunication mast and a construction pole. The duo suggest the community proximity to the city or urban live. Its middle ground plays host to two cattle, the one at the near right gazes at its audience, showing its readiness to engage the waterfront. The one at the far left appears distracted by an intruder, making the waterfront experience unpleasant and is seen chasing out the prey with its horn. The fore ground is a conglomeration of domestic and industrial wastes constituting the waters. Conceptually, the title of the piece is a metaphor, figuratively used to give a sense hope in hopelessness. Keeping in mind the beauty and view of waterfront, a place of blissful and peaceful gaze at the ocean, moreover, the views are beautiful. Contrariwise, the piece captures a slum where the front and view is municipal solid wastes of all sorts; in other words it is a a clarion call to a cleaner and better society.



Plate 4

Durodola Yusuf, 2016, Environment and Object, Plastic water Bottles, Plastic kettle, Wire, Net, Gourd, Shoe and Rags, Artists Archive.

This public performance art title “Environment and Object” was rendered in 2016 by Yusuf Durodola. Durodola is a painter by training with a master’s degree from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria [40]. He goes by the appellations performance art artist, curator, director and environmentalist. His piece Environment and Object (plate 4) is a street scene of two key actors, the concerned and unconcerned. It showcases the prevalent material that constitute dirt in the city, particularly in an average streets of Lagos, Nigeria. The two actors are seen walking and pressing forward at a particular street with paved road and concrete gutter, which suggest motor-ability and free flow of domestic water wastes. The concerned individual is seen taking the lead position in the crusade for cleaner and better environment through mopping up of waste objects, significantly plastics. This idea is traceable to the Yoruba epigram which goes thus;

Imototo,	Cleanliness,	
Lo le dekun arun gbogbo		Can put a stop to all ailment
Imototo Ile		Cleanliness of the Home
Imototo Ara.		Cleanliness of the Body
Imototo Enu...		Cleanliness of the Mouth...
Imototo,	Cleanliness,	
Lo le dekun arun gbogbo		Can put a stop to all ailment.

This epigrammatic submission is no doubt on hygiene and sanitation, which is by no small means responsible to why crusader took the lead.

His lead by example approach can also be likened to that of an environmental apostle, evangelist, advocate and nationalist Mahatma Gandhi, who was known for the slogan “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”. His selfless devotion and contribution to sanitation through sweeping and picking dirt off the street, was pivotal to India’s hygiene revolution and that of the world at large [41]. Like Gandhi, the concerned is seen selfless, patinated in green white green colouration of Nigeria and adorn in rag shoe, socks and pant. Attached to his body is net which convey all the dirt. The unconcerned individual is selfish and self centred, he is seen wearing white shirt and black pant. His posture by covering his face can be likened to indifference and nonchalance to the call of sanitation. The two actors in the piece no doubt, capture the true state of the nation where some are lifting up and other casting down.



Plate 5

Adewale Adenle, 2018, *Root Desecrated*, Oil on Panel, Cigarette sticks. 105 x 105 cm, Artist's Archive.

Root Desecrated is a mixed media painting [42]. It was rendered in 2018 by Adewale Adenle who is a painter, cartoonist, educator and doctoral candidate at the Ohio State University [43]. This piece was produced to address Western world abuse of Africa through art. In form, the piece is circular in shape, rendered to give the globular illusion of the world, with Africa beginning on the receiving end of universal wastes. The piece (plate 5), display fine brush strokes of tinted and shaded warm hue, ranging from red, purple, green, yellow to blue with a blend of white and black. Their appealing and attractive radiance, beckons on beholder, the appalling and desecrated state of Africa. In this piece, the map of Africa is personified and humanized by the artist. The map of Africa was rendered to assume the face of a lady or better still a mother, which is in tandem with the feminine status credited to Africa popularly known as “Mother Africa”. The face is seen shedding tears, as a result of the indoctrination and perpetual abuse of the continent by the West. The artist use cigarette and its addiction to convey his message. The piece houses a total of twenty-five (25) cigarette sticks. Nine (9) of the cigarette are freshly lighted, giving an impression of a coiffure. The remaining sixteen (16) cigarette are partially and completely exhausted. The sixteen (16) were rendered in a way that shows the level of decadence of the continent, which can be surmised as waste colonialism by the West. Meanwhile, her green vegetation is fast becoming overwhelmed by black colouration. The piece thematically is a clarion call on Africa and her populace to rise in unison to the challenge of waste colonialism in the continent and mitigates its perpetual reign.



Plate 7

Peter Okotor, 2019, *Let's Turn Time on the Table, Series*, Mixed media on Board, 40 x 63.5 cm, Aabru Art Collection

Peter Okotor is a multimedia painter with preference for sound. He employs old record plates and labels as mnemonic device to highlight past events in reconstructing history socially and politically. His work, "Let's Turn Time on the Table" (plate 7) is one in its series, though a painting composition, it is graphical in orientation. The piece was rendered in 2019 with the aim of taking Gen Z down memory lane, through Stephen Osita Osadebe's musical escapade in Nigeria and the world at large. The piece had its composition from archival record plate, record pouch, newspaper texts and other text. Visually, the canvas surface is painted in gray hue, serving as the turn table, stereo player and the shelf. It is divided into two compartmental halves, where the record plate takes the centre stage of the first half, while the record porch and the newspaper text takes the second half. Philips music record company that produced this plate. Its corporate name, logo and other production detail were preferentially written in white hue on a red circular background. The record pouch is square in shape. It houses the portraiture of the legendary gentleman musician from Eastern part of Nigeria, Osita Osadebe. He was dressed in Western formality of black suit, white shirt and black tie, facing his audience with a charming smile. Also, prevalent on the pouch are his name, that of his band and bar code. Below the pouch is an open leaflets fill with typed texts, supposedly his historiography [44]. Equally apparent are supporting texts of attached sheets, which are vertically and horizontally on both sides of the leaflets. The most prominent being that with the word Phonogram Limited. Obiora Library



Plate 8

Kelani Abass, 2020, Scrap of Evidence (Iferan), Letterpress type, cornerstone, oil on canvas, digital print, rubber block, metal plate and metal ball, 35 × 35 cm, Artsy.com

The piece titled "Scrap of Evidence" (plate 8) was rendered in the year 2020 by Kelani Abass, using paint and non-paint media [45]. The piece composition can be likened to a departmentalized form, holistically squarish in shape, with sub-squares and rectangles; partitioned into four halves by somewhat crucifix. The crucifix extend beyond the main frame both at the base and the left hand side. Visually the piece is a conglomeration of massive board or canvas painted in gray hue, divided into four halves with a crucifix, composed of a postcard, rubber block and three rectangular tag like metal case. The rectangular metal plates is arranged inter-sectional at the centre by a rubber block crested with an heart, symbolizing love and complemented with a photograph at the top. The crucifix or cross signifies life and death by its placement vertically and horizontally. The board houses four other boards; one complete the cross. The crucifix is divided into top left, top right, down left and down right. The top left host a rectangular wooden bar at both edge of the base with two letter press bars and a boorish, and at the top of the bar were evenly distributed letterpress's. This piece is visually in tandem with its titled scrap of evidence.

Evident in the work is the genealogy of a family, in words, text, symbols and pictures. The text IFERAN is seen evenly distributed at the base of the wooden bar. The text X, signifies the unknown both at the beginning and the end indicates reminiscence of the past, the present and the future as apparent in the three (3) photographic images on display. The

first photograph is a postcard showcasing a seated young boy on Western dress of white shirt and pant and black tie. While the second photograph captures a middle age couple, supposedly their pre-wedding or post-wedding shot. Both the groom and bride are elegantly dressed in Yoruba Ofi attire and seated in Victorian posture. The groom is adorned in fila, buba, sokoto and agbada, while the bride is in gele, buba and iro [46, 47, 48]. The third photograph is a beach scene where the couple and the rest of the family were seen relaxing at the sea shore. The trio can be likened to three developmental phases of life, which is surmised in Yoruba as aro (morning), osan (afternoon) and ale (night).

2. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the examined works, *Wealth of Nation: Ogoni Nine*, *Okirika Bale* and *On the Waterfront*, *Environment and Object*, *Root Desecrated*, *Let's Turn Time on the Table* and *Scrap of Evidence* are ...collision of competing cultures of an almost incomprehensible diversity and range [22]. They exhibit willingness to incorporate anything and everything into a given artistic design, freeing themselves from any power in culture and tradition [1]. Interestingly, all the works attest new "mass culture", significantly wastes acculturation which is the hallmark of postmodernist practice or postmodernism. These works apart from their postmodern perspicacity, had leaning in politics, education, economics, sanitation and culture.

Sadly, none of the artists under review examination proclaims or affirms postmodernism, largely for lack of theory and philosophy; which in Harrison and Wood's [49] submission requires scholastic intervention. They consequently observe thus;

... that theory must always be post hoc, ...in the sense that theoretical work is... conceived as a form of privileged insight into the psychology of practice, as when the artist offers a retrospective account of the intentions behind some already achieved body of work [49].

In view of the above submission and the prevailing postmodernist characteristics of the reviewed works, their producers therefore postmodernists. It is on this premise that the study affirms and confers postmodernism on the art and practice of the identified artists and that of the host of others whose works exhibit similar characteristics and qualities. The study conclusively hopes its findings further provokes documentation on waste art and its practice phenomenology particularly from postmodernist standpoint in Nigeria and Africa at large.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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