

**RE-DEFINING THE POST-COLONIAL NIGERIAN URBAN SPACES
THROUGH ART: CASE STUDIES IN SELECTED LOCATIONS**

By

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Abstract

The research project focuses on re-defining the post-colonial Nigerian urban spaces through art – case studies in selected locations. Therefore, the research project would explore and document the extent to which art professionals succeeded in re-defining the post-colonial Nigerian urban spaces through their artworks, installations, paintings, drawings, wood carvings, sculptural pieces in various public places in order to awaken pride in Nigeria, its' peoples, and our great cultures. Consequently, the broad aim of the project is to critique the attempts by Nigerian artists to free the minds of the viewing public from colonial relics and replace these with fervours for African arts and socio-cultural glory. The research would also discuss the Emergence of the Zaria Art Sociey whose members helped to redefine the colonial urban spaces through their Art.

Keywords: Post-colonial, fervours, theoretical framework, significance

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In major cities across the world (including Athens, Rome, Rio de Janeiro, Kolkata [Calcutta], Florence, Berlin, Moscow, San Diego, Shaanxi, and La Plata), renowned and budding artists, sculptors, prints-masters, muralists, mosaicists, and carvers seek to project and have projected pride in their nations' histories through their artworks installed at public places such as gardens, parks, entertainment centres, churches, government buildings, and educational institutions. Similarly, in Nigeria, during the colonial era (1914 to 1957), budding professional artists fervently sought to project pride in Nigeria, its' glorious past, peoples, and abiding cultures through their artworks. Indeed, these great arts professionals can be

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considered to be among the major pioneers of Nigeria's struggle for independence from European and British rule. With exposures to academic training both in Europe and Africa (including Nigeria), these great arts pioneers turned their academic training towards excellence and expertise in the various fields of arts specialisations, namely painting, sculpturing, wood carving, print-making, mural, mosaic, conversion of waste to wealth, and metal foil deep etching. With great successes through general acceptance by both government and the public, post-colonial arts professionals continued to project and replace colonial arts works with indigenous arts installations. Consequently, a very large number of artworks were commissioned by various governments, socio-cultural groups, international grants organisations, the private sector, higher educational institutions, research centres, and universities, and NGOs (non-governmental organisations). Among such commissioned works include the Sango sculpture, Emotan statute, the Gelede traditional masquerades, and Obara Ishoshi.

Inspirations for these great re-defining works by Nigerian arts professionals come from the efforts by the Federal, states, and local governments to glorify Nigeria's history, peoples, heroes, and cultures, through the re-naming of major streets, expressways, parks, schools, avenues, and roads. During Nigeria's colonial era, a large number of major roads, avenues, parks, schools, and streets were named after colonial administrators such as *Lugard, Cameron, Moloney, Bourdillon, and Clifford*. However, on the attainment of independence, there was a conscious effort on the part of governments at all levels to glorify Nigeria's history, peoples, heroes, and cultures, by renaming many of these public places after great Nigerian heroes and heroines. Thus across all major state capitals, cities, urban centres, and Federal institutions, a very large number of our public places (schools, parks, expressways, roads, streets, and avenues) were re-named after such great heroines and heroes like *Sir Tafawa Balewa, Aguiyi Ironsi, Ahmadu Bello, Murtala Muhammed, Oba Dosunmu, Oba Adeniji Adele, Emotan, Queen Amina of Zaria, Madam Tinubu, Isaac Boro, Madam Efunsetan, and King Jaja*.

Therefore, with these and other related inspirations; as well as explicit supports by governments, private sector, international grants institutions, and NGOs, a large number of great Nigerian artists and arts professionals were highly inspired to continue to project their passionate beliefs and fervours about Nigeria and its' greatness through artworks all over our public spaces. These great minds sought to fervently and vividly re-tell and re-define the post-colonial Nigerian milieu through art. Specifically, Nigerians have greatly benefited from these great minds including *Ben Enwonwu, Chika Agulu, Professor Yusuf Grillo, Jimo Akolo, Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Professor Bruce Onobrakpeya, Professor El-Anatsui, William*

Olaosebikan, Erhabor Emokpae, Simon Okeke, Wole Lagunju, Victor Ekpuk, Ogbonnaya Nwagbara, and Nse Inyang.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE ZARIA ART SOCIETY

The idea of an art society came into being in 1958. The idea was however linked to the discussion between Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko in Ibadan when they went there for interviews in 1957. While waiting for the interview the duo discussed various aspects of Nigerian Art and resolved to work hard towards Nigerian or African Art. The Zaria idea came up after the discussion of the affiliation of the Art Department of the College of Art, Science and Technology with Goldsmith College London. The idea to have the college affiliated with Goldsmith College received the support of some of the old students who saw nothing wrong in securing a foreign certificate even though lectures leading to such certificate was received in Nigeria. To them it was an honour to obtain a foreign certificate, they were keen to have a certificate in art stamped London, Some of them were not interested in furthering a career in art but simply wanted to graduate from the College. Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko who were then fresh students and room mates opposed the idea of affiliation. They urged other students to support their views. They indicated their intention to proffer reasons why it was unnecessary to let the College affiliated to a foreign one. But the old students who considered themselves more knowledgeable than the new ones saw the group as people who knew little or nothing about art and therefore could not offer any reasonable contribution. Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya and other colleagues of theirs who shared the same ideas had several private meetings on the matter and formally conveyed their meetings and conviction to the school authorities. They wanted autonomy thereafter they continued to meet to discuss this and other vital issues of mutual benefit. It was at one such meeting that the idea of forming a society came up. It was to be named and registered the Zaria Art Society. On the 9th October 1958 the Zaria Art Society was formally inaugurated. This was a great achievement. As earlier agreed by the members it was immediately registered with the Student Union of the College like all other associations. It was distinct from the Association of Fine Arts Students which was mandatory for all art students in Zaria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The essential problem that this research project seeks to resolve is the attempt by arts professionals and artists to re-define the post-colonial Nigerian urban spaces through art in a number of selected locations - mainly in Lagos metropolis. Has the Nigerian artist performed well, comparatively with his peers in other countries across the world, in projecting the Nigerian spirit, ethos, culture, and values? Has there been an

enthusiastic reception across the society, among international grants organisations and private investors in supporting these great efforts at the re-telling and re-defining the post-colonial urban spaces through artworks? Can the artworks being installed by arts professionals be sustained over the long-term?

The research project will seek to discover whether or not, Nigerian artists have been able to convey positive messages with their works of prints, paintings, murals, mosaics, wood carving, artistic sculptures, and monuments. The research project will critique these efforts and ask whether the incoming generation of artists will sustain and embrace this laudable project of using art to re-define the public/urban spaces. And if they are to sustain the tempo, would the incoming generation of artists be able to record better successes than their forebears?

Therefore, the problem that this research project will tackle is the assessment of the impact and significance of art works in urban places in liberating the minds of the viewing public from colonial relics and replacing these with fervours for African arts and socio-cultural glory.

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research project is to critique the attempt by artists and arts professionals to re-define the post-colonial Nigerian urban spaces through art.

Consequently, the objectives of this research work are:

- i. To define the characteristics of public art.
- ii. To discover the extent to which Nigerian artists and arts professionals have re-defined the post-colonial urban spaces.
- iii. To investigate and document the history of post-colonial art-works in the Nigerian urban spaces.
- iv. To document art installations in public spaces in selected urban locations mainly in Lagos and a few other cities across Nigeria for posterity and for the future generations to benefit from.
- v. To investigate how the artworks of the Nigerian artists have contributed to the aesthetics and beautification of public places.
- vi. To examine the forms, themes, and media techniques of the various art forms installed in public spaces in the Nigerian milieu.
- vii. To highlight the impact of the messages of post-colonial artworks among a wide range of stakeholders in Nigeria.

- viii. To enquire into the relevance of the iconographic meanings of post-colonial artworks in their selected urban locations.
- ix. To explore the iconographic meanings of post-colonial artworks have been received by stakeholders who hold negative views about such works in their urban spaces.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research project will be beneficial to a number of relevant and related stakeholders. These include the artists themselves made up of prints-masters, muralists, mosaicists, wood carvers, sculptors, designers, and craftsmen; as well as museum curators, art collectors, arts institutes and institutions, professors and arts teachers, and arts critics. Other stakeholders include government officials, leaders of thoughts in the public space, higher educational institutions - their management, staff, and students, church-goers and leaders, investors, sponsors, and international grants bodies and organisations. The research project will indicate the impacts of public arts on these various stakeholder groups; and the extent to which professional artists have succeeded in re-defining the post-colonial Nigerian milieu.

Firstly, therefore, the research project would be of immense significance to professional and budding artists, sculptors, designers, muralists, mosaicists, craftsmen and prints-masters because the outcome of the research project would enhance their effectiveness in creating art works and master pieces that would successfully re-define the post-colonial urban spaces in Nigeria. Consequently, being a professional artist, the researcher would have humbly contributed significantly to the study - in the academic world - of an assessment of the installations of art works in public/urban spaces.

The second set of professionals and researchers that this research project would be significant to, are museum curators, art collectors, arts institutes and institutions, professors and art teachers, and arts critics. This set of art evaluators would act as effective *go-between* with respect to the professional artists who are deploying art works in the public spaces and the receiving publics to whom these art works are targeted by being the first set of contacts for the receiving publics as to the meanings and significance of public arts. The various publics tend to trust the judgments of these art evaluators.

Thirdly, this research project would be beneficial to the important external stakeholders made up of government officials, leaders of thoughts in the public space, higher educational institutions - their

management, staff, and students, church-goers and leaders. This set of stakeholders are the receivers to whom the public art works are targeted. Artists deploy their master pieces in the various public places (parks, churches, higher educational institutions, government buildings, civic centres, and town halls and village squares) in order to re-define the post-colonial urban spaces in Nigeria.

Fourthly, the research project will be beneficial to future generations of research students – within and outside Nigeria - who are embarking upon a critique of the attempts by Nigerian artists to free the minds of the viewing public from colonial relics and replace these with fervours for African arts and socio-cultural glory. As a result of this research project, such future researchers in Nigeria and other African countries will have a rich literature to build their professional and academic studies upon. This research project would help to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the underpinning concepts and principles of public art. Therefore, such future researchers would be able to develop further areas of research in this subject-matter.

Fifthly, the research project will be significant to investors, sponsors, and international grants bodies and organisations, because it would help to show them the great importance of public arts to the development and growth of the Nigerian and African milieu. The research project would seek to demonstrate the value of indigenous art masterpieces to the development of indigenous African art forms.

Consequently, overall the researcher would have attempted to contribute positively to the development, enhancement and engendering of the professional effectiveness and outputs of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in the public displays of *Arts masterpieces*. Consequently, this research project would become a worthwhile investigation and professional academic work under excellent supervision.

1.6 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of the research project is restricted to a sixty-year period (spanning 1957 to 2017). The year 1957 marks the technical beginning of self-rule in colonial Nigeria before our full-blown independence in 1960. It was also in 1957 that the first set of budding Nigerian artists began to graduate from Arts faculties of higher institutions in Nigeria, Africa and Europe. From 1957 till date, this large number of growing and increasing arts professionals began to assert and define themselves as master artists and art professionals of great repute. Generations of professional artists continued to emerge over this sixty year period, as a result of which the *founding fathers* were able to *pass the touch* to their protégés and mentees.

Therefore, the scope of this research project will be delimited to public art works and master pieces from 1957 to 2017. During this period, a large number of post-colonial artworks were installed across the Nigerian urban spaces. These include, but not limited to *Madam Efunroye Tinubu*, *Emotan*, *Sango (the god of thunder)*, *Head of Hausa*, *Head of Yoruba Girl*, *Nkatamuo*, *Portrait of Chief Candido Joao Da Rocha*, *Nsibidi Art*, *Anyanwu*, *Ogbanje*, *Christine*, *Tutu*, *Risen Christ*, *TsiaTsia*, *Gelede traditional masquerades*, *Medical Care Delivery*, *Orere*, *Plexi Glass*, *Ekugbe*, *Obaro Ishoshi*, *Teenage Mother*, *Dancers*, *Nor Moon by Night*, *Ota Gbinowe*, *The Scholar*, *Confluence*, *Earth's Cloth*, *Black Block*, and *Earth Moon*.

There is a very rich collection of these great post-colonial art masterpieces dotting urban spaces across Nigeria, and especially the Lagos metropolis as depicted below:



Queen Mother Pendant Mask (Iyoba). Photo Louvre



Jimoh Buraimo's Work 'Meeting of Elders'



A pair of Yoruba twin figures



Nok sculpture, terracotta



El Anatsui *TSIATSIA – Searching For Connection* (2013)

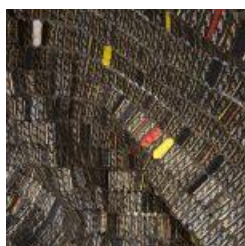
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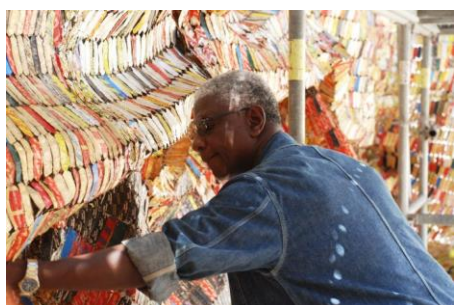
Confluence (2017)

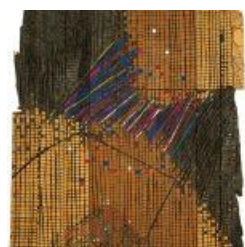


Earth's Cloth (2003)



Black Block (2010)





Earth-Moon Connexions (1995)



Sacred Secrets Unfolding (2006)



Ben Enwonwu's masterpiece, *Sango*





CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

Based on the review of extant literature and research objectives, the following constitute the conclusions from the research project:

1. That despite their exposures to European university education, Nigeria's arts founding fathers still projected Nigeria's rich heritages through public art works.
2. With blazing records as their guide, budding Nigerian artists are able to continue the project of re-defining Nigeria's post-colonial Nigerian urban spaces through art

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3. Contemporary Nigerian artists should strive to overcome sceptical receptions of public arts by some external stakeholders (such as orthodox Church worshippers)

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the research project, the following are the recommendations:

1. That governments, at all levels (Federal, state, and local) should encourage Nigerian artists in their desire to beautify our public spaces through a re-defining of Nigeria's urban centres.
2. Government and other stakeholders such as curators and arts historians should embark upon laudable activities to attract public private partnership (such as Ford Foundation) to make funding available to encourage budding Nigerian artists who continue to project Nigeria's rich cultures, great peoples and ethos through public art.
3. Internal stakeholders (namely, curators, sculptors, designers, and arts institutes) should reach out to the UNESCO to fund important sculptures that re-define post-colonial Nigerian urban spaces through art and designate such art works and monuments as world heritage centres.
4. Government and other stakeholders such as museum curators and arts historians should embark work together towards attracting visitors from all around the world to visit and patronise Nigeria's rich library of post-colonial art works in our urban spaces.

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