A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF BEN IBEBE'S PAINTINGS (1990-2010)

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Ogala Jeremiah, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "A Thematic Analysis of Ben Ibebe's Paintings (1990-2010) has been written by me in the Department of Fine Arts. Quotations are indicatated by quotation marks or indentations and sources of information are duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided.

Ogala Jeremiah **Date**

CERTIFICATION

This dissertation entitled "A Thematic Analysis of Ben Ibebe'sPainting (1990-2010) meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Master of Art (M.A) in Art History of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to God Almighty the one and only creator of the universe and to the Ogala's family for their moral support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

. Ben Ibebe is an artist who has mastered the impasto technique in painting and has utilized the expressionism style of painting. Ben Ibebe's paintings are among several paintings with poignant statements, yet his paintings are not documented through scholarly work. The researcher aims to highlight the issues that Ben Ibebe paintings postulate and evoke in the society. The objectives are to: examine the philosophy and inspiration surrounding Ibebe's focus, discuss the themes of his paintings within the context of the styles that bring them to the fore, study the techniques employed in his paintings from a thematic perspective, and categorise the themes of his paintings; based on socio-political, economic, religious, and cultural issues in the Nigerian society. The study is justified, because the artist is still alive and actively practising art. If he is not studied and documented, the first hand information about him and his art can be lost. The researcher conducted an oral interview on Ben Ibebe at his residence to derive useful information based on his philosophy, inspiration, styles, techniques and thematic representation of his paintings.The research is significant as it highlights the issues that Ben Ibebe's paintings postulate and evoke in the society. Hen ce, the aspiration for salvation from the excruciating pains of injustice, poverty, and depression encountered by the masses in Nigeria, are also highlighted in several social commentaries associated with his paintings.The related literature to this study is segregated into three sections: The researcher reviewed artists outside Africa and Africa (Nigeria inclusive).The researcher employed the use of primary and secondary sources to achieve the aim and objectives. Simple random and purposive sampling technique were also employed to select twenty of Ben Ibebe's paintings, which form the population of the study Descriptive and historical methods were used to analyze the social, political, economic and religious commentaries of the artist's paintings. These commentaries of the artist are vivid accounts of events in the Nigerian society and the world. Therefore, based on these findings, recommendations are advanced thus: The study has shown that Ben Ibebe'spaintings address the issues in the society. Hence, it is recommended that, art historians and art critics should explore and document works of other contemporary artists in the same light for futureappraisal.Finally, the study reveals that the artist has mastered the impasto style technique of painting; hence thiswould go a long way to inspire upcoming artists.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Contemporary Nigerian art is over one hundred years,a product of the colonial encounter. It was through the exertion of pioneer artist, AinaOnabolu (1882-1963) who, together with Kenneth Murray,trained many young Nigerian artists to establish firmly the concept of contemporary art in Nigeria (Sani, 2010). Hence, contemporaryNigerian art has made considerable impact in the art of the continents in various forms, suchas painting, sculpture, textile, ceramics and graphics.In contemporary Nigerian art scene, Egonwa(1994) states that, "Contemporary art refers to all artistic expressions currently existing in Africa. It consists of works created by College trained artists and their apprentices, and self-trained artists as well" [1].Danjuma (2010) infers that, contemporary Nigerian art can be said to have had extra-ordinary development since its beginning in the 1920s with Aina Onabolu who was inspired by the desire to prove a point that Nigerians are up to the task to produce paintings like those of their counterparts both in Nigeria and abroad, through the use of foreign styles and thematic representations. However, these contemporary Nigerian artists started to express themselves through modern conventions using modern media techniques.[2]

In line with the above, Muhammad (2006) states that, "Contemporary Nigerian art has come a long way, finding its path through the wilderness of experiments and schools of various orientations. Through time, such experiments have matured into a formidable expressive force for both the artists and the society in which it is produced[3]''.Muhammad stresses further that,"since the early and mid-1960's Nigeria has had a diverse upsurge of creative and stylistic outbursts from artists formally trained and those who acquired training from being apprenticed to local artists at workshop".Ruskin (1972) is also of the

opinion that, “the art of any country is the exponent of its social, political, and economic virtue”. Since the 1920s, at the emergence of modern Nigerian artists, their expressive talent has a wider range of themes which were manifested by addressing various issues in the society.Sani (2010) posits that, as rightly observed by Delacroix and Tansey (1980), “the expressionistic artist is only too aware of pain and suffering in his age”. Contemporary Nigerian art, by implication, is a manifestation of the socio-political and economic realities within the Nigerian society.[4]

Among the contemporary Nigerian visual artists who have worked with a wider range of themes,Ben Ibebewho has been deeply affected by his environment due to the various experiences in the Nigerian society. Ibebe decides to freely express hisfeelings through his paintings, influenced by his choice and preference of themes, colours, techniques and styles that stemfrom an innate obsession of his environment. It is on the basis of this development and inspiration that the researcher considered to undertake a study of Ben Ibebe’s paintings within the period of 1990 to 2010. The study focuses on the artist’s paintings with varying themes, styles, and techniques and investigates how the themes of his paintings address socio- political, economic, religious and cultural issues in Nigeria.

Ben Ibebe who was born in 1966, hails from Ughelli Local Government Area of Delta State. He began his early education at Local Education Authority Primary School,Ughelli, Delta State in 1972 to 1978. In 1986, he received his first School Leaving Certificate at Ogbaveweni Grammar School, Useifon, in Delta State. He was involved in art activities all through his primary and secondary school days. Ibebe’s initial interest was in graphics, but he later found out that he could draw and paint relatively from a young age. The graphic arts programme was vibrant from the commercial point of view. This brought additional income which was a big attraction to him. Graphics, as one of the art

forms,appeared to be his first destination. However, Ibebe was greatly influenced by his still life drawing teacher, Professor. J.T. Agberia, who happened to be his career guardian. Agberia was instrumental to his decision to opt for art as a profession; specializing in painting as a career.

Ibebeconsidered his inborn talent, and pursued it with passion and determination. He graduated with Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts in 1994 from University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. He participated in the National Youth ServiceCorps (N.Y.S.C) programme in 1995 and carried out his primary assignment at TayeQuaye Art Studio in Kaduna State.Since leaving the University, Ibebe has been practicing as a full time studio artist, and has participated in several art workshops and exhibitions.The artist is married with three children, two boys and a girl, and he is presently residing in Kaduna.The artist derived his inspirations from people around his environment and how they respond to social, political and economic forces in their daily living. The issues, ideas and events arising from man's quest to contain and contend with these forces, form the subject matter of his paintings.Ibebe's paintings are highly figurative.His paintings are finished in an impasto technique with a palette knife as a tool. This may be partly due to his draftsmanship skills and partly his inclination to human beings as the centre of focus.

Ben Ibebe's sociable spirit is better appreciated when one considers the number of solo and group exhibitions he hasparticipated in bothin and outside Nigeria. He has indeed created a niche in the contemporary Nigeria art scene. He participated inSolo Exhibitions like, the 1994 Group Graduating Final Exhibition, Port Harcourt, "1999 Mindscapes" at Alliance Francaise Kadunain 2001, and "Offering the Knife" exhibition atZaki Club, sponsored by Mr.& Mrs.Wintenberger. In 2006, Ben Ibebe attended a show "Freedom" at the Shell Trustees Estate Abuja sponsored by Vincent Del Buono and Jennifer Potheirin Nigeria. In 2009, he participated in a group show at Columbus Art Centre in University of

Toronto which was sponsored by Toronto Health Centre and the Nigerian Embassy in Canada. In 2012, Ben Ibebe had a solo exhibition at the Ashanti Gallery Abuja, hosted by Christine Gerlach. Also in the same year 2012, he participated in the 2nd Pump House Show, Niagara, on the lake of Canada, among many other shows and exhibitions.

Ibebe has also been involved in the organisation of some important art events in Nigeria and Abroad. To a great extent, He has produced several paintings and commissioned portraits for prominent leadershome and abroad. Examples are portraits of the Chief Justice of Nigeria (Mohammed Uwais), and Governor General of Canada (Adrienne Clarkson), paintings of public institutions as well as portraits of private individuals in Nigeria, France, Holland, Austria, Germany, USA, Canada, South Africa and England.Women are accorded prominent attention in his painting compositions and this is deliberate. This is because; the African woman is strong, beautiful and gorgeous despite living in a male dominated society. BenIbebe celebrates them by weaving his composition around them in their hours of need, joy and pain. Notwithstanding, men come into his compositions but as allegories in his political statement and are highly stylized.Some of his paintings discussed in this study are Empowerment, Fuel Scarcity, Freedom Rhythm, Bwotty, Relief, Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet Oil, Militant, Mai Mai, City Gate, Value, Amazon Protest, Mai Kwando, Fish Market, Mai KuliKuli, Regatta (omaluku), Ba Shiga,Makaranta, Whitesbabs, Maiden and Striving for the Light.

According to Danjuma (2010), "the use of a recognizable theme was born, and there is every possibility that it remained an integral part of Nigeria's art. The author further explains that modern Nigerian artists had drawn before now various themes that address the social, economic, political and everyday life happenings in Nigerian societies". Ben's participation in many group exhibitions and workshops organized both in Nigeria and abroad through the thematic and stylistic representations observedin his paintings is

worthy of note. This and many more insightful ideas about Ben Ibebe'spaintings are discussed in the course of this study for modern art appraisal.

Statement of the Problem

The paintings of Ben Ibebe are among several paintings produced by contemporary Nigerian artists with poignant statements.Ibebe has a unique style of painting, and he is seen as a prolific painter who uses the impasto technique to probe his subject matter. Despite being one of the artists who have produced many paintings, his works are not adequately documented by scholars. There are few literatures, articles on Ben Ibebe and his artworks; but there not comprehensive, therefore not crediting enough the artist's artistic contribution to modern Nigerian art.Therefore, the problem of this study is that, the little information on Ben Ibebe's paintings has created a gap as far as art historical documentation is concerned.The researcher therefore, acknowledges the need for Ben Ibebe'sworks to be fully studied and documented, giving particular attention to his paintings.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to highlight the issues that Ben Ibebe's paintings postulate and evoke between1990-2010, while the objectives are to:

i) examine the philosophy and inspiration surrounding Ibebe's thematic focus,

ii) discuss the themes of his paintings within the context of the styles that bring them to the fore,

iii) study the techniques employed in his paintings from a thematic perspective, and

iv) categorize the themes of his paintings; based on socio-political, economic, religious and cultural issues in the Nigerian society,

Research Questions

From the objectives stated above, the following research questions are posed;

i) What areIbebe's Philosophy and his source of Inspiration as a Painter with a thematic focus?
ii) How are the styles employed in Ibebe's paintings used to make thematic statements?
iii) What are the techniques employed in Ibebe's paintings to evoke a thematic view?
iv) How can Ibebe's paintings be categorized within the context of themes?

Justification of the Study

The gap of documentation in contemporary Nigerian art has for long been an issue and it is still debatable. This study is justified, because the artist is still alive and actively practising art. If not studied and documented, first hand information about him and his art can be lost. The research is furtherjustified for bringing to public light the paintings of Ben Ibebe's from 1990-2010 under thematic studies. The themes of Ben Ibebe's paintings are also justified to be studied because they address the current issues in the Nigerian society.It is against this background, that the researcher felt the need to undertake a detailed study and documentation of Ben Ibebe'spaintings and his contributions to contemporary art in Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

The study and documentation of Ben Ibebe's paintings explores his life as a painter and his contributions to the development of contemporary Nigerian art. It is hoped that this study will be significant in informing Nigerians about visual artand broadening the knowledge of art historians, art critics, researchers, art enthusiasts and art viewers tounderstand the socio-political, religious, cultural, and economic content of Ben Ibebe's paintings. A comprehensive and reliable documentation of Ben Ibebe's paintings will serve

as a reference material for institutions of higher learning, art galleries, museums, libraries, and other agencies. The study is also important because, the documentation of paintings of the artist while he is still alive provides first hand information on his philosophy, inspiration and relevance of his works for modern appraisal.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

To the knowledge of the researcher, Ben Ibebe has produced several paintings over a long period of time. However, thestudy of his paintings is limited to twenty of his paintings from 1990-2010.The choice of the period is to enable the researcher concentrate on the artist's paintings that address socio-political, socio-economical, socio-religious, and socio-cultural happenings in the Nigerian society through a period of twenty years. For the purpose of this research, the researcher visited Kaduna where the artist's paintingsare mostly found for the analysis and documentation. The researcher also had personal interview with the artiston his career as a painter and his paintings. The researcher further delimits the study to the themes, styles, techniques of the artist's selected paintings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is on Que'bec theory (2009) which states that, all art is political in the sense that it engages society in some way, either influencing or influenced by it. Some works speak more directly to issues relating to human rights, corruptions, and the distribution of class, wealth, sexual abuse, criminal violence and injustice. All these are concerns of Que'bec Government measures that sought to address issues in a society (Microsoft Encarta Premium, 2009).

One of the prominent critics in England at the twentieth century was William Hazlitt, a painter and essayist. He wrote about his deep pleasure in art and his belief that art could be used to address socio-political, religious and economic issues in a

society(www.newworldencyclopedia.com). The Quebec theory and William hazlitt's essay create the framework for the study. It is on this basis, that the study focuses on Ben Ibebe's paintings address the various thematic issues in the Nigerian society. Ben Ibebe's Painting was produced for basically two reasons, to meet the personal and social needs of the artist. The personal need signifies the personal expression of the painter as they portray his inner emotions of joy, sadness, apathy, anger or bewilderment. On the other hand, the social need goes beyond the personal intrinsic needs of the artist but addresses the societal issues. Ben Ibebe, through his paintings has communicated those needs to the public. He expresses his inner emotions which speak directly to various socio-political, economic, cultural and religious issues in Nigeria through his paintings. However, this leads to the notion that the artist'spaintings are lens that expresses the social happenings in the society and performs a social function or need when it is able to affect the behavior of the audience.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter focuses on reviewing literature of artists who have attempted to highlight the socio-economic and political issues in their artworksin various parts of the world (Nigeria inclusive). It also reviews some modern Nigerianartists,whose artworks and contributions play an important role in the Nigerian society, specifically, stating the themes, techniques, and styles used in their paintings. Information that is gathered from related literature are reviewed, under the following sub- headings:

i) Historical Review of Some Contemporary ArtistsOutside Africa.

ii) Historical Review of some Contemporary African Artists.

iii) Historical Review of some Contemporary Nigerian Artists.

2.2 Historical Review of some Contemporary ArtistsOutside Africa

Gardner (1975) observes that, "A work of art portrays the period it was produced. This shows that artists and their societies are related". Gardner further stresses that, "This leads to the notion that, painting performs its social functions when it is able to affect the behaviour of its audience; when it expresses those collective elements that make for the existence of a society".

Gardner in Ogala(2011) also states that, "the knowledge of the period within which an artwork is produced gives a clear knowledge of its meaning and the inspiration which it is gotten from. When artworks of common thematic features are set in a chronological order, differences may be found in the earlier works and the later ones". The author further buttresses the fact that, "appreciators who are not instructed will approach works of art with some aesthetic prescriptions of their own time, no matter how sincere they are they will fail to look at the works from the point of the artist". This also can lead to lack of

understanding of their works of art and lack of appreciation of their individual quality or works with regards to the social, economic, and political factors that influenced the work.

According to Daniel (2012),"One of the renowned artists around the world is Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), a painter in his time who is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important artists of the twentieth century A.D, aprolific artist who experimented with a wider range of styles and themes throughout his career". "One of his remarkable contributions to the history of art is pioneering modern art movement called "Cubism" inventing collage as an artistic technique.

In1937, the Spanish government commissioned Picasso to create a mural for Spain's pavilion at an International explosion in Paris. Unsure about the subject, Picasso procrastinated. However, he set to work almost immediately after hearing that the Spanish town of Guernica had been bombed by the Nazi war planes in support of Spanish general, Francisco Franco's plot to overthrowthe Spanish republic. Guernica (Figure 1) was Picasso's response to, and condemnation of that event. He executed the painting in black and white in keeping with the seriousness of the subject,and transfigured the event according to this fascination with the bull fight theme.



FigureI:Guernica, Pablo Picasso, 1937. Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. (Sources: Microsoft Encarta 2008 Estate of Pablo Picasso).

At the extreme left is a bull, which symbolizes brutality and darkness, while at the centre, a horse wounded by a spear most likely represents the Spanish people. At the top

centre, an exploding light bulb possibly refers to air warfare or to evil coming from above. Corpses and dying figures fill the fore ground, a woman with a dead child at the left, a dead warrior with a broken sword (from which a flower sprouts) at the centre, a weeping woman and a figure falling through a burning building at the right are also depicted, The distortion of the figures expresses the inhumanity of the event. To suggest the screaming of the horse and of the mother with the dead child, Picasso transformed their tongues into daggers. The painting's colour scheme, inspired by the black and white newspaper photographs, proved effective for conveying the cruel reality. The composition of truncated bodies and super imposed images draw on techniques of cubist collage. However, with this portrayal of the agonies and atrocities of war, by implication of the painting, Picasso spoke out against war and injustices perpetrateagainst any defenseless people (Microsoft Encarta Premium, 2008).

Another artist Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), an American abstract painter, who developed a technique for applying paint by pouring or dripping it unto canvas, laid on the floor. With this method, Pollock produced intricate interlaced webs of paint, as in Black and White seen in Figure II. Rapid and seemingly impulsive execution like Pollock's became a hallmark of abstract expressionism, a movement that emphasized the spontaneous gestures of the artist(Microsoft Encarta premium, 2008).

Pollock's early paintings,which were realistic scenes of life in America, clearly reflect Benton's influence (Benton was Pollock's art teacher). As his career progressed, Pollock rejected his teacher's representational subject matter, but retained his emphasis on rhythmic, dynamic composition. In New York, Pollock was also exposed to the work of Mexican mural painters, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Their experimental techniques, large scale and use of industrial paints had a lasting impact on Pollock's work.After moving to a larger studio on Long Island in 1947, Pollock began

creating his characteristic large-scale abstractions. He placed the canvas on the floor, worked on it from all directions, and poured paint directly on it. His new method resulted in part from his interest in Native American sand paintings, which are created on the ground with sand of various colours. However, Pollock described his abstraction as an attempt to evoke the rhythmic energy of nature. He reinforced this dynamism with compositions that emphasised all parts of the canvas equally without visual center of attention. Although the press often derided Pollock as a purely impulsive and untrained artist, in reality he used careful calculation to achieve his compositions, avoidingemphasising one area over another (Microsoft Encarta, 2008).



Figure 2:Black and White, Jackson Pollock (Action Painting) in 1948. Pollock Krasner Foundation/Artist Rights Society (ARS) New York Photo. Source: Microsoft Encarta Premium 2008.

Paul Ganguin (1848-1903), is another renowned artist who overtime had shownso much interest in theorizing about ways painting ought to follow. Ganguin rejected objective representation in favour of subjective expression. He wrote disparagingly of impressionism. Chipp in Blaise (2014) states that, "the impressionist study colours exclusively, but without freedom. Always shackled by the need of probability, for them, the ideal landscape created from many entities rests upon a solid base, and ignores the

means the nature of the sensations perceived by means of colours".Ganguin has theorized on most of the aspects of the practice of paintings especially on the usage of subjective colours. Gardnerin Emmanuel (2014) infers that,"Ganguin's use of colour sets new context and differs from the impressionist especially that of van Gogh who used heavy thick brush strokes. Thus, what the artist is able to do is to provide means through which feelings can come to be known". Similarly, Langer in Emmanuel (2014) states; what does art seek to express? ...I think every work of art expresses, more or less purely, more or less subtly, feelings and emotionsthe artist has; has insight into nature of sentience, his picture of vital experiences of physical, emotive and fantasy.

Banjoko(2000) explains that, "Eugene Delacroix (1790-1863), another vibrant painter,was the leader of the Romantic art movement. In his famous painting(Liberty Leading the People). Delacroix recaptures the spirit of "the Romantic revolution". He has symbolized the struggle for freedom against the forces of tyranny in his portrayal of allegorical figure of the goddess of liberty leading the people of France over the barricades seen in the Figurebelow.



Figure 3:Liberty Leading the People, DeclaroixA.D, 1830. Louvre, Paris, Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York). (Sources: Microsoft Encarta 2008)

The event that must have led to creation of this work was the July revolution of 1830 in Paris. The figure of the goddess, tall and placed in a central position, dominates the whole scene. She is not a static figure but is engaged in going forward in raising the tricolour of France high above everything; she is a symbol of the energy and action.

According to Adams (2007), the Norwegian artist,Edvard Munch (1863-1944) went to Paris in 1889, where he came into contact with Impressionism and Post Impressionism. The combination of symbolist content with Post-Impressionism was particularly well suited in "Munch's character". The author maintains that, his mental suffering,like Van Gogh's was so openly acknowledged in his imagery and statements that it is unavoidable in considering his work. His pictures conform to symbolist theory in that; they depict states of mind, emotions, or ideas rather than observable physical reality.



Figure 4: The Scream, Edvard Munch, 1893 The MunchMuseum/Ellingsen Group/ Artist Rights Society (ARSz), New York. (Source:Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2008.

In his best known painting titled "The Scream" executed in 1893, as seen in theFigure above, Munch displays his sense of disintegration onto a figure crossing the bridge over Oslo's Christainaford. The bright colours of red, orange, and yellow intensify

the sunset, with darker blues and pink defining the waters. Both sky and water seem caught up in an endless swirl that echoes the artist's anguish.In contrast to the pedestrians at the far end of the bridge, Munch stops to face the picture plane simultaneously screaming and holding his ears. Munch describes the experience depicted in the painting as follows: "I felt as though a scream went through nature - I thought I heard a scream - I painted this picture – painted the cloud like real blood. The colours were screaming". He thus joins the scream of nature as his form echoes the waving motion of the landscapes(Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, 2008). It is expedient to know that, in the painting titled "Scream", Munch tries to portray the scenario at which man is physically depressed and oppressed by the situations in his environment either provoked by the Government or the masses and here one can see a man screaming for help.

Historical Review of some Contemporary African Artists

The review of literature in this section centers on African artists and their paintings. Such paintings depict societal issues and everyday happenings in the African societies. Adams (2007) infers that, "many modern African artists have sought different ways of arousing awareness by promoting their culture through the use of different media. In Africa, we have artists like PapaIbraTa'al, Ibrahim Salabi and host of them have preserved their cultural heritage by drawing inspirations from existing cultural traits". Adams concludes that, "several modern Nigerian artists have usedsome aspects of their environment as sources of inspirations".

Similarly, Saliu(2009) states that, "Art plays an essential role in the lives of the African people and their communities. It serves a much more vital purpose than merely to beautifying the human environment, as art is usually employed in contemporary Western societies". He further stresses that, "the beauty of African art is simply an element of its function, for these objects would not be effective if they were not aesthetically pleasing".

According to Fosu(1986), “Afewerk Tekle (b.1923) of Ethiopia, defiled the style of Coptic miniature paintings which, for so long, had exercised unbridled hold on Ethiopian art. Theyoung aspiring artist, Aferwerk Tekle immediately blended new ideal with the disciplined image of the old, and gave to his country a reliable means to entire modern Africa without giving up its respected ancient character. The author further stresses that, “Afewerk Tekle had the distinction of painting the impressive stained glass monument to African unity in the African house in Addis Ababa”. Fosu maintains that, Tekle’s modern murals of local saints and biblical stories contrast in style with ancient paintings with similar themes in Ethiopian churches, although the luminosity in these paintings appears to be derived from the legacy of the tones of the Coptic manuscripts. The author concludes that,Tekle employs modern perspectives and realism in their execution rather than the traditional diminutive and distorted style.



Figure 5:African Unity, Afewerk Tekle at African Hall Addis Ababa (source: www.Selamtamagazine.com)

The painting “African Unity” (Figure 5), has been praised by many as one of the best works on pan-African political themes. Representative images of each of the independent African countries of the period, fully dressed in their traditional robes, are

portrayed within mammoth map of Africa. The theme deals with the aspiration and achievements of Africa in the past, present and future. The theme of African independence and the interrelationship of African cultures are indelibly etched in AfewerkTekle's creations. However, in an attempt to stress out major points in respect to global issues as an artist,AfewerkTekle stresses that "Your brush can be quite stronger than the machine gun," he said "I wanted to show how you can write about Africa through your artwork, what it means to have liberty, to have your fellow humans completely equal". The characteristics of bold lines crossing linear lines, which he super imposes over the painting as he has done in many of his other drawings, sketches and paintings, help to emphasize the unity of the theme as they help to unify and balance his composition and arrangement, (www.selamtamagazine.com,2008).



Figure 6:Through our Efforts, Afewerk Tekle (Source:www.3rdman.com)

In line with Afewerk Tekle's Statement, Otuewena (2002) affirms that, the focus of man and society is on the activities of man on the planet earth, which immediately conjures images of woes, destruction, injustice, human right violations, and the degradations of the environment. The author further states that, some artists restrict themselves to their immediate environment, while others address global issues, as demostrated by Afewerk Tekle in the Figure above titled "Through our Efforts".

According to Fosu (1986), Tanzanian pioneer artist,Sam Ntiro based most of his paintings on the indigenous survival cultures of the peasant. He sees them as providing some of the answers to the modern African economic woes wrecked by years of colonial control and mismanagement in Africa. Fosu maintains that, the salvation of the new economic order, according to a series of paintings; depends on self-reliance based on the tradition a principle of Ujamaa of working together. Ntiro cherishes dignity in labour and believes in co-operative work. He characterizes the themes in his paintings which, according to him, often feature people going to work, at work and coming from work as unifying factors for the economic spiritof the new nation of Tanzania.(See Figure 7 below).



Figure 7:People at Work, Sam Ntiro. (Source: 20th Century African Art by KojoFosu 1986)

Fosu (1986)further stresses that, Sam Ntiro has proclaimed to the world that "My painting is a memory of what I know best of the life of my people". These are rural people, daily engaged in the struggle for survival, tilling and reaping the land.Ntiro is proud and eager to share the joy and romance of the rural life with city folks. He indicates that "I find fulfillment in my characteristic style". In answer to a commonly echoed criticism, he replied, "WhenIam not satisfied with my style as a medium of my expression, the change will present itself. It will not be forced". He takes pride in pointing out that his paintings perform a function for African audiences.

Historical Review of some Contemporary Nigerian Artists

Contemporary art in Nigeria has had a phenomenal development since its beginning in the 1920s. This development began in painting through the artistic courage and adventure of AinaOnabolu into a style of painting that was alien to the Nigerian art tradition of that period.His painting was European in style and was different from the African style. Stanley in Gushem(2011) traces the birth of ContemporaryNigerian art to the early 1920s. Stanley claims that, AinaOnabolu returned to Nigeria from Europe with a Diploma certificatein Fine Arts in 1927 and began teaching art in secondary schools with the help of foreign art teachers who transformed art practice in Nigeria.

Furthermore, these developments have continued over the years among Nigerian painters from the time ofAkinolaLasekan, Ben Enwonwu, and Zaria Art Society to the periods of the Ulli movement, Ona art, Eye society, Noghart movement and the graduates of the various art schools in Nigeria. Kennedy in Yohanna(2000) observes that, "the training of prolific artists in Africa occurred at the Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology, Zaria. In 1960, the College had graduated artists who strongly influenced artistic development in Nigeria and around the continent. Some modern Nigerian artists who have done considerably well to impact modern Nigerian art are as follows:

Jerry Buhari,born in 1959in Akwanya, Kaduna State, Nigeria, is arguably one of the most prominent articulators of the scholarship of painting in the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His cosmopolitan exposure on the international art scene has given him the enablement to view art from his own perspectives as it relates to the society. Buhari, who is a learnedpainter, is responsible for churning out a great percentage of painters from the stables of the Fine Arts Department in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he has taught art for over two decades.

Blaise(2014)states that, much of Jerry Buhari's art is loaded with dense social commentary directed at the daunting of social, economic and political conditions in Nigeria. His painting on National issues as seen in the Figurebelow is a fabric installation and a commentary on the state of the Nigerian nation where scrap fabrics seem to illustrate the chaotic temperament of democracy which describes the current anarchic state.



Figure 8:National Issues, Jerry Buhari, 2014 (Source Blaise 2014)

Jegede (1996) states that, his painting titled "Abuja: Things fall Apart" as seen in the Figurebelow, describes the state of the seat of government against the backdrop of the growing activities of insurgence in the northern Nigeria, general nature of injustice and political anomalies. The author further states that, the painting should have brought the

wrath of the Goodluck Jonathan government on the artist, if they care at all about an artwork having any potency to cause any harm on the stability of the governance. Instead of a threat or arrest to express disgust as such a tone of expression, a blind and deafear is turned and the impunities continue. When Idris Abdulkareem released his song titled "Nigeria Jaga-Jaga" during Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure as President of Nigeria (1999-2007), he was touched and replied that, it is the artist that is "Jaga-Jaga". This type of response, in the first instance, perhaps, shows how attentive the government was, but instead defended itself over the various issues raised by the artiste in the song. Some of such problems include sporadic shootings borne out of kidnappings and robberies caused by inept governance, at the time.



Figure 9: Things Fall Apart, Dele Jegede, Abuja:" Latex on Canvas, 32m x 28m, 2009,
(Source: Peregrination exhibition catalogue)

Ogala (2011) explains that, "GaniOdutokun, a renowned world class artist was born in 1946 to the family of Raji and HumuanOdutokun at Teacher Mente, part of Samson's village near Nsawan in Ghana".Ogala further stresses that,Gani was a prominent artist, who had indeed created a niche in the modern Nigerian art scene through his paintings. Odutokun made series of paintings with liquidized oils, thinning his pigments

until they became fluid, dripping his colours directly on canvas. However, while dripping, he strove to control the intractable process in order to create pictures. In order words, during the modern Nigerian society, the artist saw his paintings as a tool for improving man's existence.

Furthermore, Gani'spaintings were also influenced by the military gymnastic, political transition to democratic rule in the Nigerian society. Odutokun reinstated Zaria to its position of influence; he also changed the direction of Zaria painting style. His colours wereselected from his Zaria environment, and, as such, expressed the natural feeling of the scene around him. Danjuma (2010) states that, "the major artistic philosophy of Gani is based on what we called (Accident and Design). Ganisaw accident as having a symbiotic relationship with design. Gani's paintings focus on socio-political and economic issues. His painting titled "Dry Earth" (figure 10) was executed in the liquidized technique, and it portrays the anger and frustration of the artist where the masses are suffering, while the politicians kept on extorting the wealth of the nation. It is an impressionistic and socio-political painting.



Figure10: Dry Earth, GaniOdutokun, Oil on Canvas 88cm by 61cm. 1993, (Source Ogala 2011)

Otu, et al (2015) also state that, GaniOdutokun has both covertly and overtly shown through his art how badly government performs. The three colours of red, black and white (figure 10) are metaphors of the increasing destructive activity of the nation's police force. The background depicts bloodshed typical that is of the inept attempts the police have shown in protecting life especially. The authors further state that, in the painting titled "Police Brutality" (Figure 11), two female figures are depicted in both hands of the beastly depicted police officer with a chevron on the short sleeve shirt showing the rank of a sergeant. This suggests the rank which police officers get to and revel in cold blooded murder popularly called "accidental discharge" when they cover up for shooting their victims. One might infer that the use of female figures does not necessarily imply that women are the only victims, but that of the helpless state of the citizens.



Figure 11: Police Brutality, GaniOdutokun, Poster Colour, 72x55cm, 1994.(Source: International Journal of Art and Humanities- IJAH 2015)

Jacob JatJari is also known as a prominent artist who was born on April 19, 1960 in Plateau State, Nigeria. He was trained as a painter and art historian at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he has been teaching for over 18 years. A highly educated scholar,

abreast with the current developments in his discipline. Professor Jari attends exhibitions literally all over the world, making it almost a yearly routine. He is fascinated by the possibility of re-engaging discarded objects such as cornstalk, pieces of fabric and paper in creating artworks. He thinks it would be wonderful if human beings had a second chance to relive their lives all over again, such blissful opportunities as provided by the discarded objects he employs (ARESUVA, 2008).

Farka in the Figure below is taken from Jari's"Bullet Hole Series" where he used discarded fabrics of different colourations and design, and placed them behind a canvas screen perforated by compacted holes from a red hot metal rod. He simulates the effects of bullet holes penetrating the flesh of humans, animals or objects. There is an allusion to the social reality of Nigeria where much injustice was meted out through the gun barrel by military regimes of the past dispensation. The power of this work, "Farka",was made from fabric material unto canvas sewn with thread and wool.



Figure 12: Farka (Bullet Holes Series), Jacob Jari, Fire and Fabrics on Canvas, 70 x70cm, 2008.
(Source:Aresuva 2008).

Otu, et al (2015) explains that, AbiodunOlaku, another prolific artist, has spent a couple of years depicting dusk and dawn scenery of houses built on the riverine areas of Lagos. This is devoid of the splendor typical of the busy city centre of Marina and Victoria Island. The authors further explain that, the artist attempts to reveal the neglected side of Lagos with the aim of drawing government attention to improving the living conditions in the areas depicted. However, the rendition betrays the squalor typical of Olaku's subject.

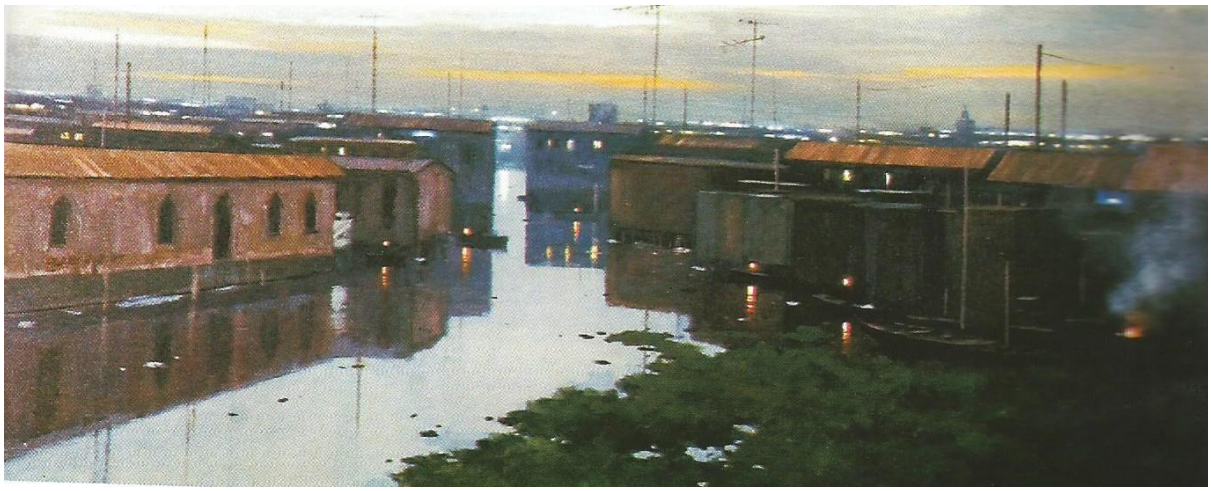


Figure 13: Grey Tunes,AbiodunOlaku, Oil on Canvas, 95 x 110cm, 2005,
Source: Modern Nigerian Art, Art Expo Exhibition Catalogue 2008

The painting titled "Grey Tunes" like many othersOlaku has made, seldom allows the viewer to see the dilapidated nature of the houses depicted. Instead his approach to the subject venerates the scenery as places worth living in, drawing all sundry to the visual appeal presented in the planning.

Otu, et al (2015) assert that, it might be inferred that, it saliently depicts the political struggle that is evident in Nigeria's type of politics today or any form of tussle for a top seat. Moreover, the work is open to more interpretations that might be subtle and pleasant to various perceptions.

EdosaOguigo is another painter whose painting of two men on horseback motivates the need to cohabit. Otu, et al (2015)stress that, in the painting titled "Friends" both riders look like identical twins on identical horses, though the horse to the right of the painting

has a white mark running down the front of the head. The overall depiction in relation of the title that calls for friendship has not shown any reason why both men will not easily befriend each other. The artist presents two men from a position of avoiding any thought of envy of each other in a world where it is a common place for supremacy over possession.



Figure 14: Friends,EdosaOguigo, Oil on Canvas, 81 x 119cm, 2011,
Source: Nothing but the Truth Exhibition Catalogue, 2013

Conclusion

From the foregoing, a safe assumption could be made that the majority of artists around the world have made considerable impact in their societies, by portraying the socio-political and economical issues through their artworks. Despite all these issues happening in the society, the government is not sensitive enough to pay a close attention to the needs of the masses. In Nigeria,for instance, all manners of crimes and insurgencies are drastically destroying the nation. The review of artists around the world has guided and assisted this study positively. Hence, in the same vein, Ben Ibebe has produced various paintings that address the socio-political, religious, cultural and economical happenings in Nigeria.

Despite the fact that, a lot of scholars or writers have written so much about the social ills and happenings in society, it seems the government is silent about it, without any drastic measures to effect a positive change in Nigeria and the world at large. Other forms

of art such as animation, literature, music,sculpture, among others, have been used by artists as tools to express their feelings and thought about social happenings in the society.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research is based on the study of Ben Ibebe's paintings with specific focus on his themes, styles and techniques. Hence, to carry out an effective study, appropriate research approaches were adopted in order to guide, assist and lead the study to a fruitful result. A number of methods have been adopted by previous art history researchers in order to facilitate the conduct of their researches. Adetoro (1997) states that, "in order to gain control of a research, the investigator must examine various procedures". Similarly,Babalola(2006) states that, "research is a consistent, diligent, laborious search for the truth". These include how the researcher's objectives were tackled. Hence, the researcher adopted the historical and descriptive methods of research for this study.

The historical method wasemployed to examine Ben Ibebe's career as an artist, his source of inspiration and what motivated the artist into choosing art as a career. The descriptive method relied on photographs of Ben Ibebe's paintings. The descriptive method was also used to interprete the artist's paintings, some of which are expressions of his moods and feelings. In addition, relevant and effective research tools were used for collection of data. These include; an interview schedule, digital camera and notepad. Consequently, the data collected wasanalysed and findingsenumerated.

Sources of Data

The data to this study was collected through the primary and secondary sources. The primary source was obtained from the field to gain first hand information through observation, photographs and oral interview with the artist, while the secondary sources are the available literary materials relevant to the study. The literary materialsincludejournals, magazines, exhibition catalogues, unpublished theses, and newspapers.

Primary Source

Primary source is getting firsthand information, a direct or personal contact with the respondent in sourcing for vital information. The researcher obtained information from the artist directly through personal interviews and visits to the artist's studio, to see some of the works, and also engage him in discussions about the works. Egonwa in Umbugadu (2010) states that, the primary source "is a method which a researcher uses to obtain first hand information".

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources areavailable literary materials relevant to the subject of the study. These sources havebeen employed by scholars like Muhammad (2006), Obadofin (2015), among others, and they proved successful. The secondary sources consulted are textbooks, magazines, exhibition catalogues, newspapers, and Theses as well asDissertations in the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Population of the Study and Sampling Procedure

The population of this study is focused basically on Ben Ibebe's paintings executed from 1999 to 2010. In selecting the population for this study, the researcher used the simple random and purposive sampling methods. Akuezuilo,in Sani (2010) explains that simple random sampling is a method of selecting a sample from a population so that all members of population have chances of being selected", while purposive sampling method is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher selects units to be sampled based on their knowledge and professional judgment(Sani, 2010). Among the numerous paintings produced by the artist, twenty paintings were randomly and purposive selected and studied based on his themes, style, techniques that arecentered on relevant issues of socio-political, economic and cultural happenings in our society. Twenty of the paintings were randomly selected from the artist's studio. Then, the paintings were purposively and thematically

distributed.Hence, six paintings address socio-political issues; seven paintings address socio-economic issues, three paintings focus on the socio-religious issues,while four paintings are onsocio-cultural issues.

Pilot Study

According to Sani (2010) emphasizes that, "the pilot study prepares the foundation on which the research proper is built". Based on the above, a pilot study was carried out to ascertain the suitability of the research instruments. A brief interview was successfully scheduled with Ben Ibebe with the aim of finding out the suitability of the research instrument, before its final administration on the artist.

Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was carried out through Field work, Oral Interview, Internet, and Related Literature.

Field Work

Stokstad(2008) states that, "The actual field research" means that a researcher should go into the field for personal contact with the subject of research. Field work entails visit and observation. The researchertravelled to Kaduna to visit the artist in his home and studio where an oral interview was conducted to obtain reliable and first hand information on the subject of study. A structured interview schedule to get information from the artist was used by the researcher, which was in turn used for the analysis in chapter four of this study. This method was also used byYohanna (2000), Muhammad (2006), and Umbugadu(2010) while conducting their research. Through this method, they were able to arrive at a logical conclusion. In view of this, therefore, the researcher adopted same.

Research Instruments and Tools

The instruments for data collection include: interview schedule, literature, internet sources as well as digital camera.These are briefly explained:

Literature: The researcherconsultedvarious but relevant literatures. This includes; a newspaper, Theses, exhibitions catalogues and so on. The information was used to support primary information obtained from the field.

InternetSources: The researcher made use of internet facilities to also gather information about the artist and the study in general. The internet served as one of the most important sources of information for the study.

InterviewGuide: An oral interview with the artist based on a structured interview schedule, was conducted in the artist's house and studio. The researcher met with Ben Ibebe on two occasions. The first visitation was when the researcher went for written materials on Monday 10th of August 2015, while the second was during the oral interview on Saturday 17th October, 2015. The artist was asked about the titles, themes, styles, and techniques of his painting, his sources of inspiration, philosophy surrounding his thematic focus and educational history. The artist's response to the interview assisted the researcher in the analysis of the artist's selected works. Oral interview conducted with a structured interviewed guide as an aspect of research instrument, has been used by previous researchers in art history like Adetoro (1997), Babalola(2004), Sani(2010), Muhammad (2006), to mention but a few. Through this method they were able to obtain effective and valuable information.

Digital Camera: Photographs of the artist's paintingswere collected for the purpose of descriptiveanalysis. Photographs of selected paintings, which were not in the artist's possession, were made available with the use of a digital camera to take photographs of the

paintings found in the artist studio and house. This aided the researcher in no small measure in describing as well as interpreting Ben's paintings.

(For the purpose of a detailed analysis of Ben Ibebe painting, every data collected was used for the study).

Method of Data Analysis

The researcher adapts the qualitative method which combines both historical and descriptive survey approaches as posited by Sullivan (2005) for research of this nature. The study is designated a Qualitative base research, because it is descriptive and historical. It involves systematic and detailed explanationsof BenIbebe's paintings. This research design is considered the most suitable for obtaining information for the study. This method was used by Scholars like Duniya (1999), Muhammad (2006), and Sani (2010). A tabular format of the analysis was also included to give a simplified summary of Ben Ibebe's selected paintings for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter is centered on the analysis and discussion of the findings of the study. The findings cover Ben Ibebe's painting for a period of twenty years (1990-2010). The discussion is based on the information collected through oral interview and photographs. It is hoped that the end result of the discussion will lead to better understanding and documentation of various paintings executed by Ben Ibebe. A total of twenty works were selected for this purpose. All the paintings are oil on canvas.

BenIbebe has painted and exhibited several artworks across the country and the world at large. Some of his paintings are in Toronto Canada, while several others have been acquired by private corporate bodies. The paintings of Ben Ibebe selected for analysis and discussion are: Militant, Striving for the Light, Bwotty, Regatta, Value, Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet Oil, Relief, WhitesBabs, Amazon Protest, Bashiga, Freedom Rhythm, City Gate, MaiKulikuli, Makaranta, Empowerment, Mai Mai, Fuel Scarcity,Mai Kwando, Maiden, and Fish Market.

Ibebe stated that "women are mostly used in his paintings as well as men, but they come in mostly as allegories in his political statements and are highly stylized". Hence, of note are the series of his paintings on restive youths that deal with issues of civil unrest and rioting among the various ethnic groups, especially in the Niger Delta. Ben Ibebe is not a landscape painter, but paints them to highlight certain human activities such as the series of market scenes and urban slums. However, the harsh living reality and exciting human spectacle of buying and selling at an African market are showcased,while other paintings show people struggling for survival, living on stilt houses on water in urban towns of Lagos and Port Harcourt.

Ben Ibebe is an accomplished portrait artist who is also proficient in various painting media, like charcoal, gouache, pastel, and water colour. His present medium, however, is oil colour applied with a palette knife as a painting tool in an impasto technique. His finished paintings often come out in a style of impressionism. Other times, idealism, abstract formalism, and sometimes dovetail into semi-abstraction or full abstraction. BenIbebe's works are a mélange of rich impasto textures; blocks of colours like panes of stained glass come together to form the style and technique of his paintings. Ben Ibebe's expressionist style imparts on the viewer, the density of life in Nigeria. A rhythmic pattern pulsates from the canvas, portraying the restlessness and anxiety surging from his African Nation.

Table Format of the Analysis of Ben Ibebe Paintings

The analysis for this study is based on Ben Ibebe's painting themes. In this section, the researcher adapts a table format of analysis and categorization of twenty paintings produced by Ben Ibebe which was extracted for the purpose of this study. These paintings are segregated into four themes; Socio-Political, Socio-Economic, Socio-Religious, and Socio-Cultural".

PAINTING THEMES	TITLES OF PAINTINGS
Socio-Political	Empowerment, Amazon Protest, Militant, City Gate, and Freedom Rhythm, and Relief
Economic	Fuel Scarcity, Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet Oil, Mai Kwando, Fish Market, Mai Mai, Striving for the Light, Bwotty and Mai KuliKuli.
Religious	Value and Makaranta
Cultural	Regatta (omaluku), Ba Shiga, Whitesbabs, and Maiden

Categorization and Presentation of Ben Ibebe's Paintings

The analysis for this study is organized based on Ben Ibebe's painting themes as follows:

Socio-Political Themes:

The word "Socio-Political" has to do with relating or dealing with the affairs of the government, politics, or State. Hence, some of Ben Ibebe's paintings that depict socio-political theme are discussed on this platform. They are Empowerment, Amazon Protest, Militant, City Gate, Freedom Rhythm, and Relief.

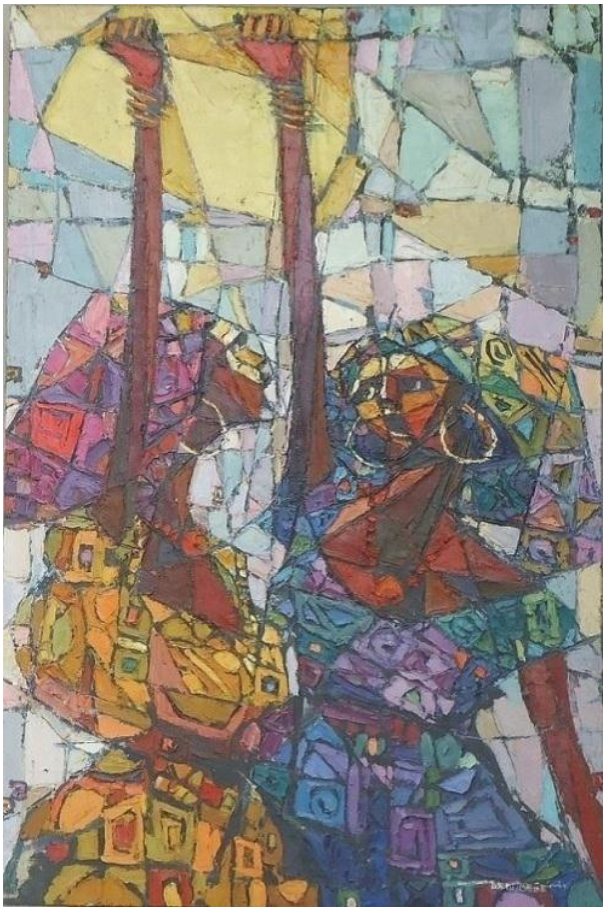


Plate I: Empowerment, Oil on Canvas, 122cm x77cm, 1999, Collection of the Artist

The painting for this analysis is a socio-political themed painting "Empowerment" produced in 1999 as seen in Plate I. The painting is done using an impasto technique of painting to represent the figures in abstraction. The artist attempts to depict women agitating for empowerment and recognition in the society. The painting seems to illustrate

the state at which women have been deprived of their human rights in the society, and as such it is obvious the women get to a point of protesting to encourage other women going through the same issues to arise and stand up for their rights. From a more critical observation, one could see that the figures have gloomy faces, depicting all signs of grievances protesting for freedom. The artist introduced impasto style of painting using lines, shapes and motifs to represent the figures. Furthermore, the painting was produced during General Babangidaand GeneralAbacha's regimes, when people experienced extreme poverty, and the situation in the country was tense and critical. Women's rights were not duly acknowledged in the society. The artwork is characterised by brilliant and dull colours which depict the artist's mood towards the societal ills in Nigeria.

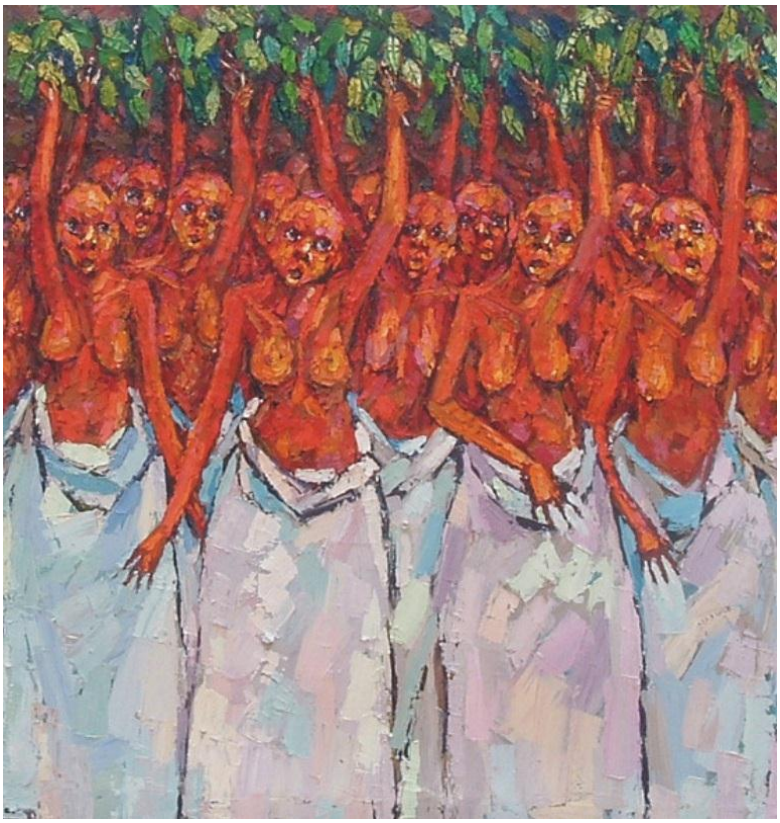


Plate II:Amazon Protest Oil on Canvas, 113cmx97cm, 1993, Collection of the Artist

The “Amazon Protest” (plate II) is an allegorical painting produced by Ben Ibebe in 1993. It is a characterised of women protesting with leaves for their human rights in the society. Ben Ibebe attempts to portray the women agitating for freedom and justice due to the way some of their counterparts have been molested sexually and violently”. The painting, which is a socio-political commentary, seems to illustrate the state at which the women have been deprived of their human rights in their country, and as such it is obvious that they are not scared or ashamed of anybody. All they need is that, freedom and justice must take its place in the society. From a critical observation, one could see that the figures are not fully dressed and their faces are gloomy, depicting all signs of grievances and bitterness. The painting was done in an impressionisticway, using the impasto technique to represent the figures. This painting is a socio-political commentary.

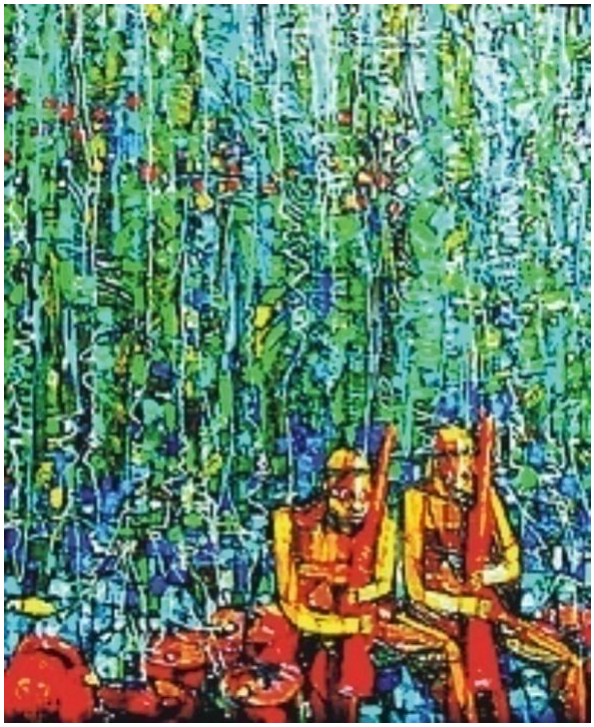


Plate III:Militant, Oil on Canvas, 107cm x 92cm, 1998, Collection of the Artists

The painting "Militant" was produced by Ben Ibebe in 1998 as seen in Plate III. The artist used different lines approach to represent the thick vegetation and the oil rig where these Niger–Delta militants dwell to protect the crude oil around that region against external invaders. The painting was produced in an impasto technique, using palette knife to depict the thick vegetation, the figures and the oil swamp region. If one looks closely, it could be seen that those figures holding riffles are at an alert, while on their right are some oil barrels. This simply means that, these militants can kill because of the love for the crude oil, and such they are not scared of the government. As long as the government does not develop their communities, they are not willing to let go of the oil. This has been a battle between the militants and the government. Hence, all they need is negotiation. Ben Ibebe attempts to observe the issues and the happenings in the Niger-Delta region, and tends to express his feelings and thoughts about this critical situation in the country. This expressionistic painting is a socio-political commentary involving the ruling class and the militants in the community.



Plate IV:City Gate, Oil on Canvas, 107cm x 104cm, 2003, Collection of the Artist

The painting “City Gate” was produced by Ben Ibebe in 2003 as seen in plate IV. It is an allegorical statement about life in the walled city of Zaria. It is an expressionistic painting which portrays the natives. Alcohol and things uncommon with their religion are prohibited within the city. Some of the natives work within and the city walls, while other natives earn a living from people in the outer sabo areas. If observed critically, some figures are seen proceeding into the city gate in Zaria with their luggages for various purposes most times, to see the Emir or his cabinets. At the gate, there are protocols that are put in place for the governing kingdom and must be strictly adhered to. When one looks closely at the outer court at the top of the painting, northern houses are depicted in brilliant colours. The wall of the city gate serves as a boundary of the city, and the artist portrayed it with northern motifs which make the work appealing.

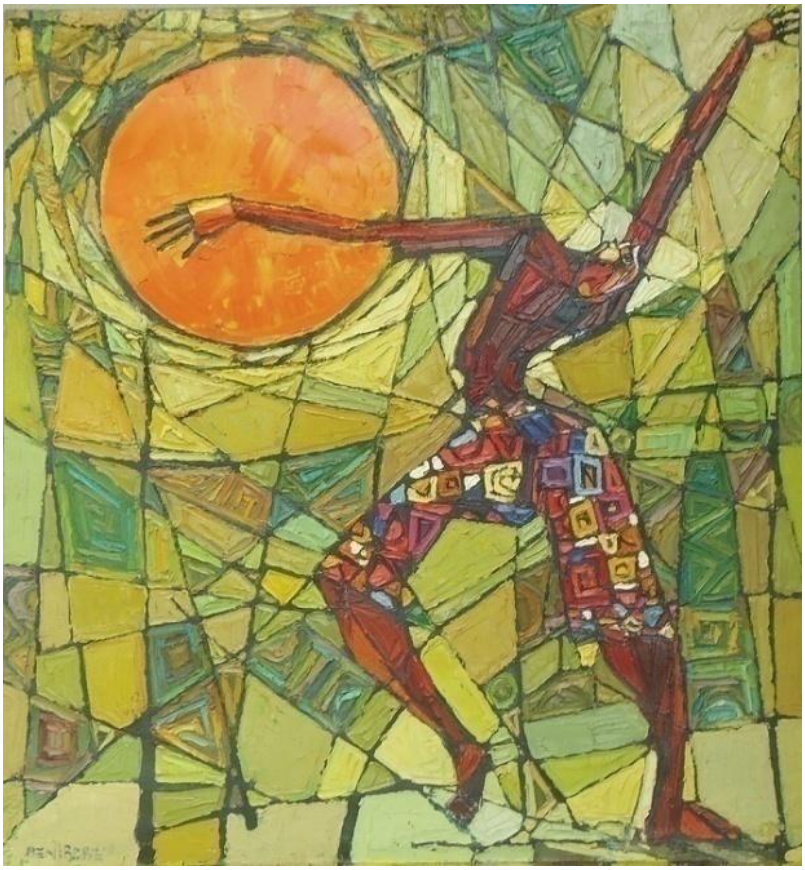


Plate V: Freedom Rhythm, Oil on Canvas, 95 x 102cm, 2010, Collection of the Artist

The painting "Freedom Rhythm" (Plate V) is a socio-political painting produced in 2010 by Ben Ibebe. However, the painting was produced in an impasto technique, showcasing a figure in abstraction with various motifs and lines which make the work appealing to the viewer. Ben attempts to depict a man who has long been detained without freedom unjustly by a government agency, finally was out of that long suffering and persecution. Hence, all he could do was to dance to the rhythm of freedom to have his life back again. The idea the artist portrays is that, innocent people in the society suffer unjustly for crimes they did not commit, while corruption, eats deep every day in the society.

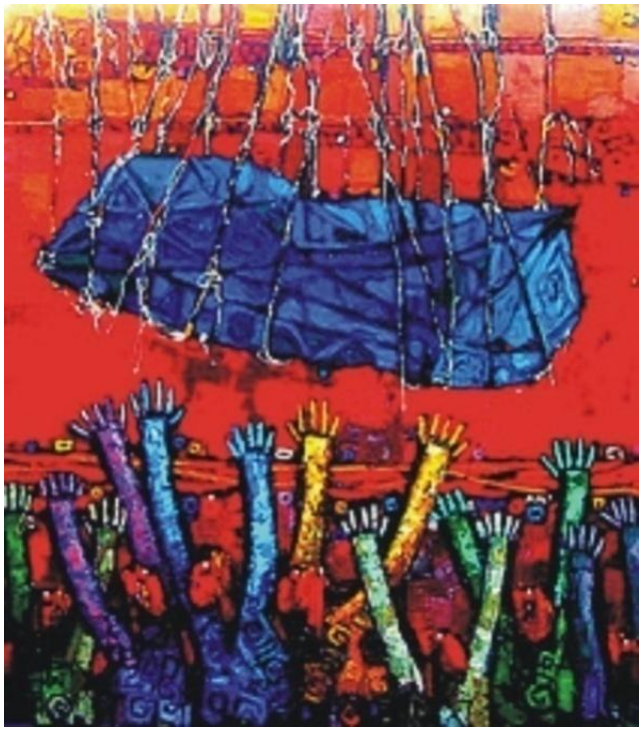


Plate VI: Relief, Oil on Canvas, (110 x 97cm), 2000, Collection of the Artist

Another socio-political painting for this analysis is “Relief” produced by Ben Ibebe in 2000 (Plate VI). The painting produced using an impasto technique to represent the figures in abstraction. Ben Ibebe attempts to depict the people striving to earn a living, but they have been restrained due to bad governance. If one looks critically, there are big blue bags hung up in the air, and in them contains the treasury bills or finance that is meant to sustain the masses for their hard labour in the country, and people are seen stretching their hands and struggling to get what rightfully belongs to them. Unfortunately, some of the people have been relieved of their jobs, and so they find it difficult to survive. The figures are in abstraction, and the colours are vibrant alongside with motifs on the figures that make the painting unique. The red colour symbolizes the harsh conditions that the people are experiencing. The harmonious relationship of the various colour shades of red,blue, green, purple, and orange creates an aesthetic design quality of the painting. Therefore, the colours are symbolic representations of the hostility of the government to the people in Nigeria.

Economic Themes:

The term "Socio-Economic" deals with the reciprocal relationship between society and the economic factors. It also means a study that brings about under development, usually in terms of lack of improvement in a society, life expectancy, illiteracy and level of unemployment. It is on this basis that Ben derived his themes and as a matter of fact, he introduced it in his paintings. The socio-economic paintings being analysed here are: Fuel Scarcity, Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet oil, Mai Kwando, Fish Market, Mai Mai, Striving for the Light, Bwotty and Mai KuliKuli.



Plate VII:Fuel Scarcity, Oil on Canvas, 97cmx110cm, 2005, Collection of the Artist.

The painting "Fuel Scarcity" (Plate VII) was produced by Ben Ibebe in 2005. The artist attempts to portray the socio-economic issues in the society, thereby expressing his feelings towards the situation at hand which depicts people going through an intense hardship in terms of fuel scarcity and lack of financial empowerment. The figures in the painting are in abstraction, and depict the state at which the people are in desperate need of

fuel. The painting was done in an impasto technique expressing the feelings of a man in a socio-economic situation. From a more critical observation, one could see at the top of the painting, cars queued up in search for fuel at a filling station. While at the bottom of the painting, one could see human carcasses on the grounds that were burnt as a result of oil spillage and oil theft. This shows that the people are willing to go any length to steal fuel by bursting oil pipe lines, not minding the risk of their life. The artist reveals his techniques through lines, harmonious colours and motifs to express his feelings.



Plate VIII: Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet Oil (Deprived), Oil on Canvas, 91cmx107cm, 1995, Collection of the Artist.

This painting "Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet Oil(Deprived)" is an expressionistic painting that captures the lack of attention by the government and multinational oil companies in the region to improve the quality of life. The activities of such multinational oil companies, gas flaring and oil spills, have left the ecology in ruins. The painting also captures the situation of unemployment in the region which is high due to the lack of skilled manpower. Infrastructure development is also low and lacking. Life is generally hard.

The inspiration for this painting stemmedfrom a statement made by Ken Saro-Wiwa, of blessed memory, one of the Delta's illustrious sons. During one of the forums organized by the government to look at how to deal with the issues of the Niger Delta, the "People's Representatives" demanded a 13% share of the money derived from the oil extraction, while the government only offered 3%. Saro-Wiwa at that point said, "You cannot steal my shirt and offer me three buttons as compensation".

The oil painting was produced with palette knife with attempts to recreate the impenetrable mangrove forest with thick heavy paint, culminating in the lower part of the painting in oily swampy water containing dead aquatic fish lying upside down. In between the greenish impenetrablemangrove forest are dots of bright colours such as yellow, orange, blue and red all signifying human habitation. To get the feel of climbers and vines, liquefied enamel paints are applied rhythmically dripping vertically across certain portions in the painting. At the center of the composition is a traumatized hungry looking youth clutching a bowl, he looks lost with the lizard as his only companion. The figure represents the lonely lives of the natives of the remote mangrove swamps. The bowl contains three cowries (money) signifying the reward the people get for the exploitation of their land and resources.

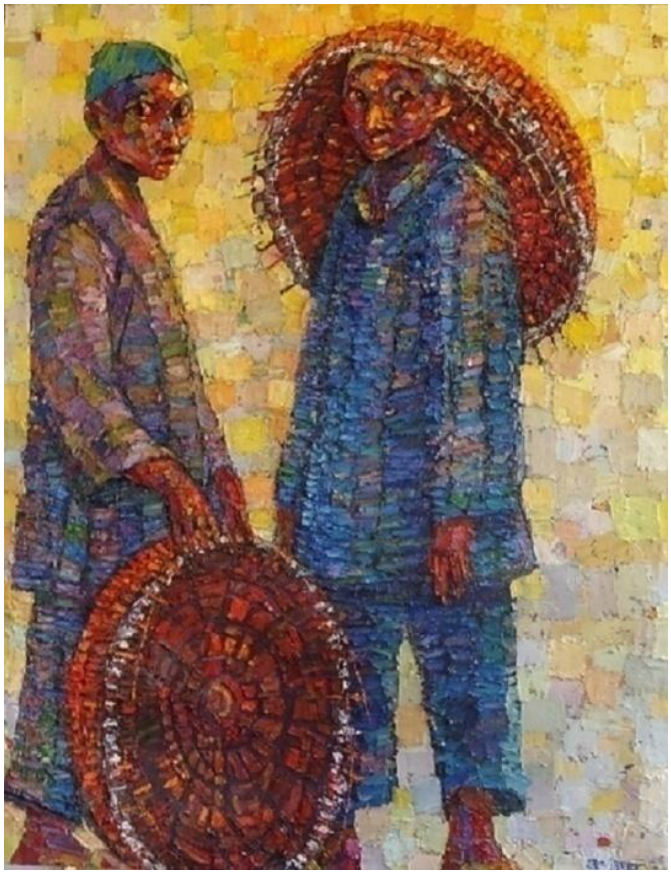


Plate IX:Mai Kwando, Oil on Canvas, 118x92cm, 2007, Artist'sCollection

The painting "Mai Kwando", as seen in Plate IX, is an oil painting produced by Ben Ibebe in 2007. It portrays two young boys popularly called maikwando; which means load carriers in the northern region of Nigeria. The artist attempts to depict the scenario of the young boys who are less privileged, and have no option but to carry loads for people in order to earn a living".The whole idea, the artist was trying to express is that, these children are supposed to be in school and not to be engaged in such activity. If observed critically, one will notice that, the faces of these figures look dejected, sad and gloomy. The painting was done in an impasto technique using palette knife and thick paints. In the painting, there is a strong use of colour and palette knife strokes that express the frustration of the circumstances happening in the society. This style of painting is impressionistic and the theme of the painting is socio-economic.



Plate X:Fish Market, Oil on Canvas, 112x101cm, 2000, Artist's Collection

The painting "Fish Market" (Plate X) portrays a typical market scene as witnessed in many parts of northern Nigeria where immense commercial activities take place on market days. The market is usually over-crowded with traffic congestions and other related issues". The idea behind the painting is that, the artist tries to depict a scenario where women struggle so hard to make ends meet in the family. If one looks vividly, one could see many women selling and buying fish that have high level of protein, not minding the stench. A few male figures can also be seen in the fish market. The painting is presented in a vertical position and the theme is within the socio-economic context.

The painting is dominated with impasto paints, skillfully utilized by the artist to define the figures with various shades of colours being are highlighted at the background. Theimpressonistic painting depicts the market scene in northern part of Nigeria, which is usually over-crowded and as such roads are blocked with display of food items by traders.

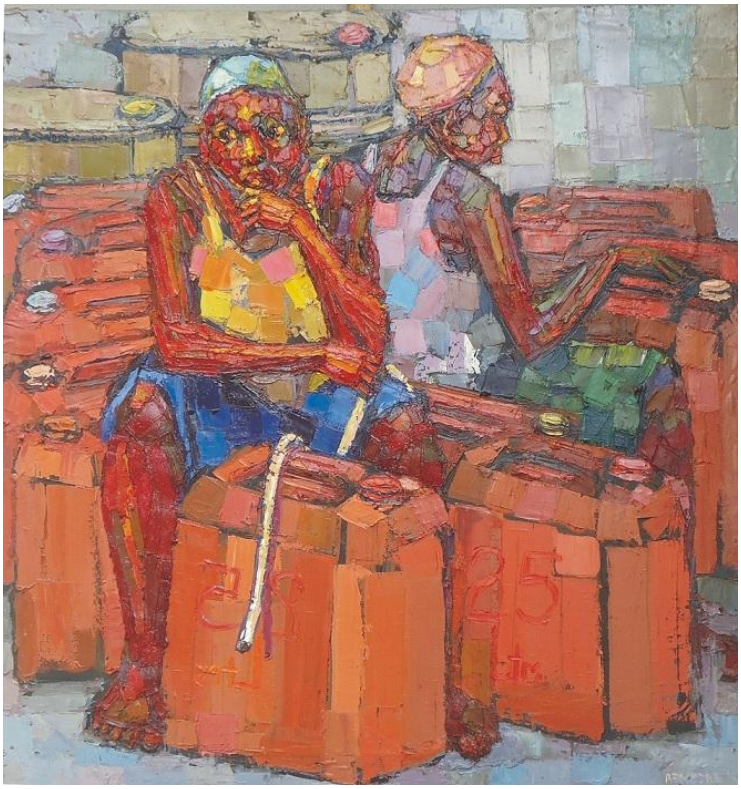


Plate XI:Mai Mai, Oil on Canvas, 99cmx104cm, 1997, Collection of the Artist

The painting titled “Mai Mai” means (oil oil), as seen in Plate XI, is an impressionistic and allegorical painting depicting the state at which lack of fuel in the country (Nigeria) has led some people into fuel theft or hoarding fuel in the case of the black market sellers; despite a huge deposit of crude oil in the country. The painting appears in a horizontal position, comprising of two figures surrounded with big gallons of fuel. The painting depicts the fuel sellers in anticipation for more fuel either through a negative or positive means, just to survive.

The painting is a socio-economic commentary which dwells on the unwholesome activities of fuel dealers, particularly the fuel scarcity that was experienced in 1997 during the regime of General Sani Abacha. Unfortunately, many fuel accidents and fire incidents were reported as a result of fuel theft or oil spillage.

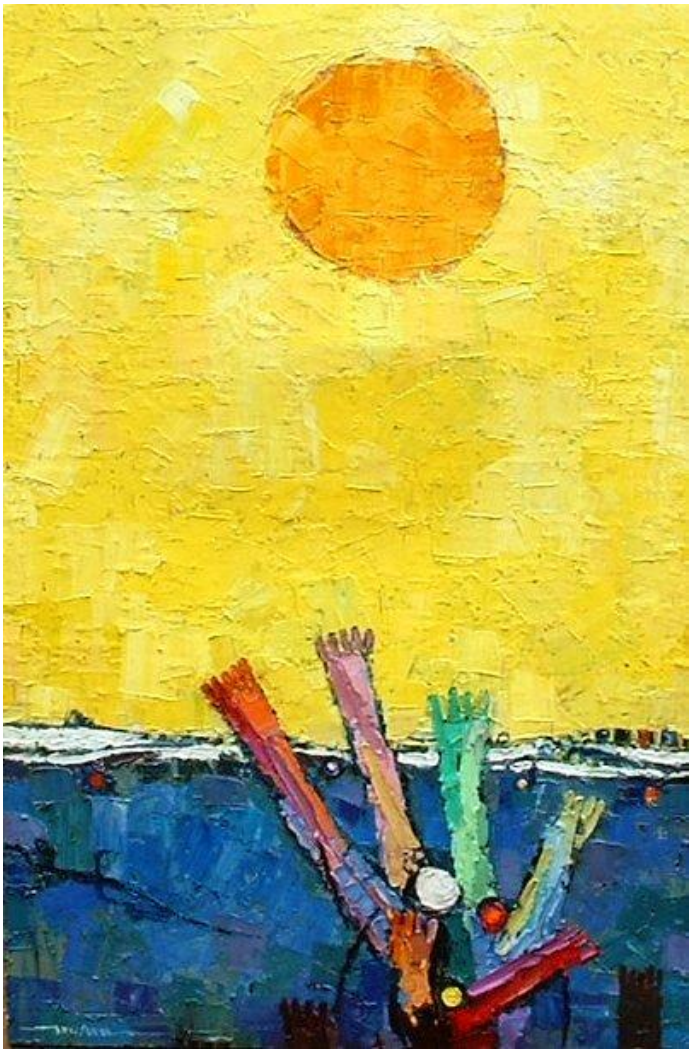


Plate XII:Striving for the Light, Oil on Canvas. 77x105cm, 2009, Collection of the Artist

The painting titled “Striving for the Light” by Ben Ibebe in 2009 is an expressionistic and allegorical painting that captures the masses in oppression and difficulty; hence they strive for the light to which is their freedom as seen in Plate XII. The artist attempts to portray the painting of these figures in abstraction, stretching their arms for a better day and not to be in difficult circumstances or hardship anymore. The artist expresses his frustration and anger as a result of the state of Nigerians who are going through a difficult situation. A distinctive feature of the painting is that, the paints are thick in an impasto technique. If observed critically, the people are hopeful and believe so confidently for a change when they get to the light.



Plate XIIIBwotty Oil on Canvas, 77cmx105cm, 2005, Collection of the Artist

The painting titled “Bwotty” which means stolen valuables (oil), as seen in Plate XIII, is an impressionistic and expressionistic painting depicting a state at which a man is seen in a theft of fuel in a big gallon to sell in order to survive. This is as result of a hardship condition, lack of job, and oppression by the government in the country that has practically led the young man into such criminal offence.

The painting is a socio-economic commentary which stipulates the circumstances the masses are experiencing due to vandalised pipelines; dead fishes in the river as a result of contaminated water, lives wasted as result of fire outbreak and some people rendered homeless. The artist expressed his feelings in an impasto technique using colours like red, yellow, purple, and green.



Plate XIV:Mai Kulikuli, Oil on Canvas, 110x102, 2008, Collection of the Artist.

The painting titled "Mai KuliKuli" (Plate XIV) captures the socio-economic functions of women in the northern part of the country. This colourful oil-painting captures three old ladies selling kulikuli (groundnut oil and its cakes). Their attire attests to their faith and culture. Their aged features depict rigor and vicissitudes of life. They sit close to each other, but their gaze and focus are far away. They stare fixed, determined and expectant perhaps waiting for customers that are hard to come by. The painting is an expressionistic painting that captures the scenario of the northern people. It was done in an impasto technique using palette knife and paints. In the painting, there is a strong use of colour and palette knife strokes to express the socio-economic condition in our society. The style of the painting is expressionistic and the theme is socio-economic.

Religious Themes

The word "Socio-Religious" has to do with relating or dealing with the social and religious aspects in a society. Hence, some of Ben Ibebe's paintings that depict socio-religious themes are discussed on this platform. They are: Value and Makaranta.

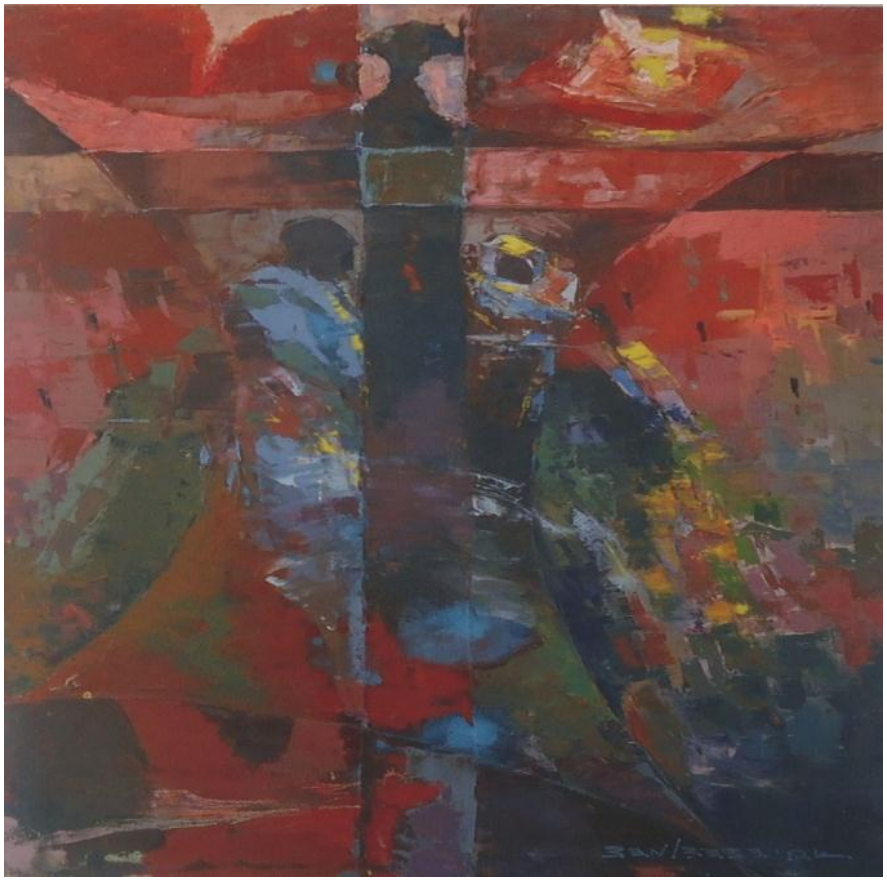


Plate XV:Value, Oil on Canvas, 59x89cm, 1993, Collection of the Artist

The painting "Value" was produced by Ben Ibebe in 1993. The artist attempts to portray the religious differences and influence in the society. Religion is supposed to make people to unite and live together peacefully in harmony, but the reverse is the case. If one observes closely, there are two major religions; Christianity, and Islam. In the painting, the artist attempts to portray the two religions through the use of the symbol of a cross and a crescent moon and star. However, there are two figures, male and female. The male

symbolizes the Christian and the female symbolizes the Muslim. Just like a man falls in love with a woman, it is the artist's desire for them to unite as one, but they cannot get together because of their different backgrounds. The artist's use of colours like red depicts the violent nature at which these two religions have brutalized themselves because of religious backgrounds and differences, while the colour blue portrays the calm and cool nature if people unite together as one. The painting is an impressionistic painting.



Plate XVI:Makaranta, Oil on Canvas, 102x110cm, 2005, Collection of the Artist

This painting “Makaranta” is an idealized painting by Ben Ibebe produced in 2005, which symbolizes typical Quranic schools as operated in many parts of the northern Nigeria. The painting consists of six semi- abstract figures with geometrical shapes and motifs. The mallam and his five Quranic students in front of him with their slates, portray a reminiscence of the old method of learning the holy Quran. The wooden slate is a medium used by Quranic students to learn written portions of the holy Quran. The background of the painting captures a quiet and solitary scene required for intensive learning exercise of this nature. At the top of the painting, if observed closely, are northern housing structures alongside donkeys and a camel, which depict a typical northern environment. The painting is nostalgic and shows the intensity and commitment of the mallam and his Quranic students, unlike what is obtainable these days in many parts of northern Nigeria, as the students roam about in search of alms or food. Unfortunately,

many have fallen prey to unscrupulous politicians and people who engage them in fuelling crises in the name of religion. The painting is socio-religious in nature, and it rekindles conditions under which scholars engage themselves in learning and memorization of the Holy Quran.

Cultural Themes:

The word"Socio-Cultural" is a term that relates to both social and cultural matters in society. However, the artist decided to initiate this aspect as one of his themes or subject matter in his painting. They are: Regatta (omaluku), Ba Shiga, Whitesbabs, and Maiden

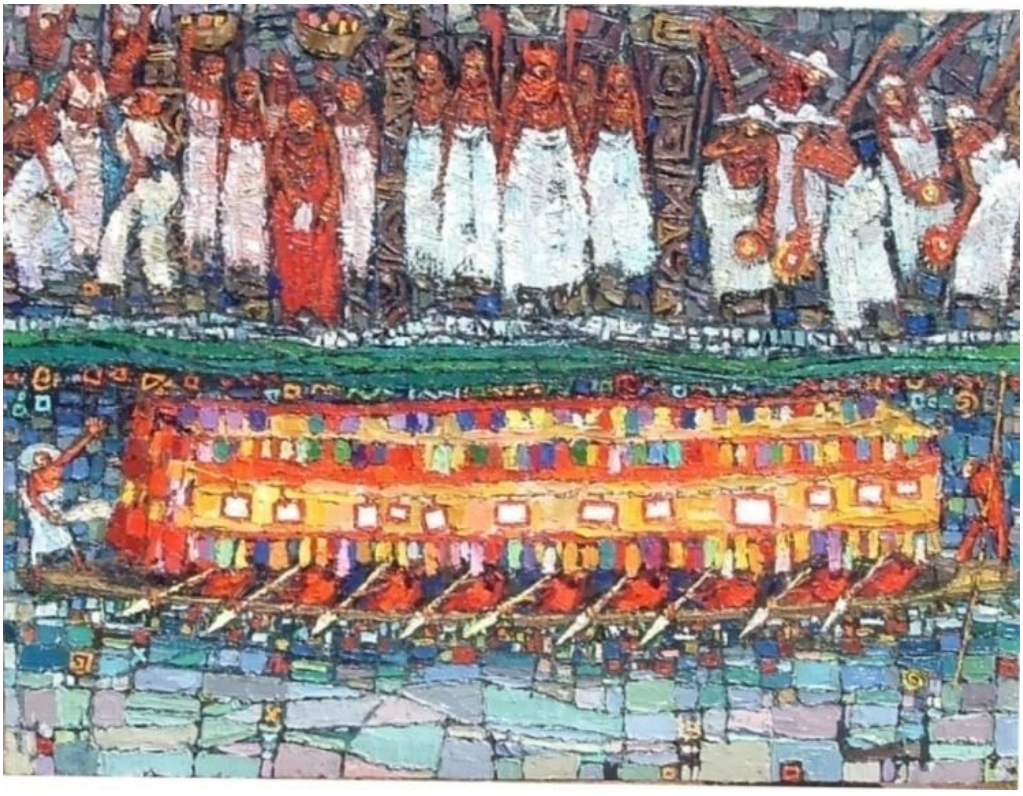


Plate XVII:Regatta (omaluku), Oil on Canvas, 97x128cm, 2002, Collection of the Artist

The painting "Regatta (omaluku)" is a spectacular painting produced by Ibebe in 2002. This painting typically portrays the fishing festival (ore iyeri) that is celebrated each year in the month of September in Delta State. The construction of the canoe used for the festival is entrusted to a few well chosen craftsmen, and its site is hidden from everyone except the chief priest of the water deity (omaluku). It takes several months to execute the

preparation of the canoe and the festival, only to be seen during the celebration of the festival. What the artist attempts to portray in this painting is the socio-cultural nature of his people in varied strokes and shades of colours such as red, white, yellow, blue, green, and brown.

The Impressionistic painting was done with oil on canvas, and it is divided into two parts by green lines. The upper part in the painting depicts the celebration activities. The chief priest and adherents venerate the water goddess displayed at the left hand corner of the painting, while the king in the middle with his chiefs declares the celebration open. Hence, lots of social activities and cultural dances take place during this period. On last day of the festival, people gather around the river bank to enjoy the euphoria of the regatta, signifying the end of the festival.

The lower half of the painting shows the splendor of the regatta canoe beautifully decorated with coloured fabrics and mirrors. If observed closely, one could see that there are people seated in the canoe symmetrically and paddling in rhythm to the sound of the drum. There is a head dancer at the front who performs rigorous acrobatic traditional dance.

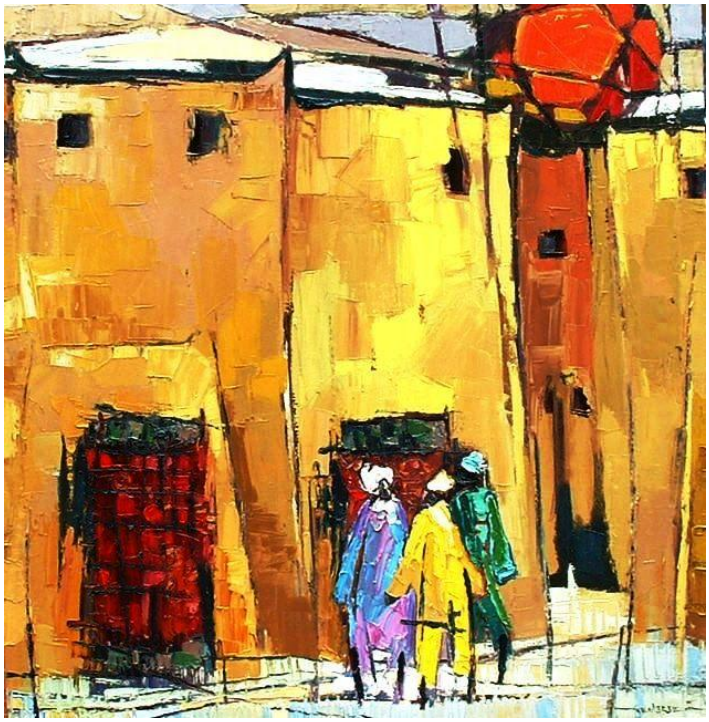


Plate XVIII:Bashiga, Oil on Canvas, 94x104cm, 1997, Collection of the Artist.

The painting“Bashiga” was produced by Ben Ibebe in 1997. It is an expressionistic painting that portrays theway of life of Muslims in the northern part of Nigeriaas seen in Plate XVIII. The word “Bashiga” in Hausa means “No Entry”. However, this simply means some typical married Hausa men do not allow visitors to come into their homes without permission. They preferdiscussions to be held within the premises of the house and not inside. The reason is that, his matrimonial home is not to be seen by everybody, but just him, his wife and children. In this painting, BenIbebe draws the viewer’s attention to some of the northern people’s way of life and the civic responsibilities that should be adopted in every marital home.

The painting was done in an impasto technique with colours like red, yellow, brown, green, purple and white. The harmonious relationship of these colours depicts a sunny day, and one can see three figures in abstraction at the entrance of thehouse, but there is a barricade that does not allow them gain access into the house. The painting theme is socio-cultural depicting the people’s way of lifestyle.



Plate XIX:Whitesbabs, Oil on canvas, 107x102cm, 1990, Collection of the Artist.

The painting "Whitesbabs" was produced by Ben Ibebe in 1990. It is an expressionistic painting that portrays the socio-cultural way of life of the people in the olden days. Viewing the work critically, one could see three figures,a man, woman and a baby riding on a silver bicycle, which is called the "Whitesbabs". The whole idea of the artist is to bring to the limelight the cultural value of his people. The affluent people at that time use the bicycle, and it is an improvement than walking bare footed. The painting is symbolic in the sense that, whoever rides on the whitesbabs was considered a wealthyperson in the community at that time. The reason is because, not everyone could afford it. If one observes critically, one could see this family in a harmonious relationship. This painting depicts the tactical idea of the past before modernization. Ibebe's use of lines and motifs on the background of the work creates an aesthetic quality of the painting. The painting is socio-cultural portraying the people's way of life many years ago.



Plate XX:Maiden,Oil on Canvas, 110 x 102cm, 2010, Collection from the Artist.

The painting "Maiden" (Plate XX) was produced by Ben Ibebe in 2010. It is an expressionistic painting that portrays a beautiful maiden depressed after being deeply hurt by her fiancé. She is in a state of dilemma. The artist attempts to depict this painting with brilliant colours that suggest the ideal beauty of a lady. If one looks at the painting critically, one could see the gorgeous nature of an African lady with a beautiful costume and highly beaded. The artist depicted the painting with some motifs and lineson her costume which depicts the aesthetic nature of the painting. The theme of the painting is socio-cultural depicting the way an African lady is adorned.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

All that have been discussed in chapters one to four were attempts made to highlight Ben Ibebe as an artist and his works of art. In this chapter, the summary of the research findings are presented upon which conclusion, adequate recommendations and suggestions are advanced.

Summary of Findings

The findings on the thematic analysis of Ben Ibebe's paintings between 1990-2010 are been summarised as follows:

1) Ben Ibebe was born in 1966, and hails from Ughelli, Delta State. Ben has been practising as a full time studio artist, and has participated in several art workshops and exhibitions. His paintings are highly figurative and they are finished with a palette knife as tool.
2) The study has shown that Ben Ibebe over time, has explored different styles in oil painting, to express his feelings of the environmental happenings in the society.
3) Some of Ibebe's paintings produced between 1990-2010 are: Empowerment, Amazon Protest, Value, Regatta, Mai Kwando, Fuel Scarcity, Militant, Niger Delta Bad Terrain Sweet Oil, Striving for the Light and many more but just to mention few.
4) The artist has confidently demostrated his artistic skills to illustrate and interprete socio-political, religious, cultural and economical issues in the society. All these serve as his sources of inspiration and philosophy which are environmental happenings around him.

5) The study revealed that, Ibebe's technique of painting is a mélange of rich impasto textures; thereby showcasing blocks of colours like panes of stained glass.

6) Ben Ibebe's expressionist and impressionist styles mostly impact on the viewer the density of life in Nigeria. Other times, his finished paintings often come out in idealism, abstract formalism, semi abstraction and full abstraction. This can be seen in his use of various colours such as red, blue, green, yellow, orange and among others.

In Summary,the whole idea of this research work focuses mainly on Ben Ibebe and his artworks. Chapter one of the study highlights the history of Contemporary Nigerian artist who paved a way for other Nigerian artists with emphasis on Ben Ibebe, schools he attended and his style of art. This is done by emphasising the unique roles he plays in the growth of modern Nigerian Art. In chapter two of the study, the literature review was centered on historical artists around the world, in Africa and Nigeria to highlight their themes and styles of paintings.In chapter three, methods and procedures of data collection as used by some previous scholars in art history were employed in getting all the necessary information on the artist such as primary and secondary sources. Simple random and purposive sampling methods were also employed to select paintings for the study. Chapter four gives a brief history of Ben Ibebe as an artist, his contributions to Contemporaryart, his exhibitions, anda comprehensive analysis of twenty of his works (paintings) which span a period from 1990-2010. This was done under four categories (themes) for easy understanding. These categories are socio-political, Socio-economic,Socio-religious andSocio-cultural.

Conclusion

From the investigation carried out on Ben Ibebe and his works of art, it was discovered that the artist began to engage in art practice at an early stage of his life, while he attended primary and secondary school. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts as a painter from the University of Port Harcourt. Ever since then, he has been practising as a full-time studioartist,Ibebe was greatly influenced by his still life drawing teacher, Prof. J.T. Agberia who happened to be his career guardian. Agberia counseled Ben Ibebeand was instrumental in his decision to opt for art as a profession; specializing in painting as a career.The artist is married with three children (two boys and a girl) and presently residing in Kaduna, Nigeria and has participated in several art exhibitions both within and outside Nigeria.

This study discusses the life of Ben Ibebe as an artist, his artworks and the impact he has created in the society through his paintings. Ben Ibebe derived his inspirations from people around his environment and how they respond to social, political, religious and economic forces in their daily living. The issues, ideas and events arising from man's quest to contain and contend with these forces, form the subject matter of his paintings. Ben'spaintings are highly figurative are finished in an impasto technique with a palette knife as a tool.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings of this study, and the discussions that followed, the following recommendations are made:

Since Ben Ibebe is one of the practising modern Nigerian artists,

1 The Nigerian government (Federal, State, and Local) should patronise the artist and acquire as many of his works as possible.Reason being that, these paintings go a long way in addressing the issues in Nigerian society.

2 It is also recommended that researchers in Art History section of Fine Arts Department, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and all over Nigeria should explore more deeply into Ben Ibebe's unique style and technique of painting, as he is a prolific artist whohas produced many paintings and owns an art studio where he can be easily reached.

3 The Kaduna and Delta State Governorswhere Ibebe spent most of his lifetime in art practice and exploration,should encourage and promote the artist by giving him special grants for the expansion of his studio to an international standard. This will make it possible for the artist to exhibit his paintings to Nigerians and foreign artists, investors, tourists and parastatals in Nigeria and around the world on a regular basis for modern appraisal and patronage. In addition, many aspiring artists can be able to learn from the artist while practising in his studio.

4 Private organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGO) are also encouraged to patronise the artist through acquisition of his artworks, which can be displayed at strategic positions within their establishments. These include hotels, airports, banking halls, and many others.

5 Through these forms of patronage stated above, the artist's role in promoting contemporary art in Nigeria would be exposed to aspiring artists to be encouraged to practise and excel in their respective fields.

6 Furthermore, the encouragement and patronage will inspire the artist to produce and exhibit more works in respect to socio-political, economic, religious and cultural issues.Thereby, exposing Nigerian art for aesthetic appreciation and public enlightenment.

Contributions to Knowledge

The Study has:

1. The study reveals the reality of the situation and happenings in the Nigerian society. Hence, art viewers and enthusiasts are enlightened and educated.
2. The creative ability of the artist in the area of impasto technique is made known and can be adopted by upcoming artists.
3. The study serves a referral material for researcher most especially art historians and art critic for further historical documentation on practicing visual artists.

NOTES

(1) For more detailed explanation on modern art, see Danjuma, K.N.(2010) "A Comparative Analysis of the Paintings of GaniOdutokun and Jerry Buhari", Muhammad, A. (2006) "A study of KaltumeBulamaGana's Artwork and Her Contribution to Contemporary Nigerian Art",Egonwa (1994) African Art.

(2) AinaOnabolu is believed to be the pioneer of modern art, not only in Nigeria but also in Africa. He grew up in the midst of the Europeans and proved to them that our art is not primitive but unconventional. He is known as the father of modern art because he laid the foundation upon which other renowned artists were to build. Refer to (Danjuma, K.N. (2010).

(3) Kenneth.C.Murray happens to be one of art expartraites or teacher in modern Nigeria art schools. He was appointed by the Nigerian government to teach art in Nigerian schools. Refer to (Sani 2010).

(4) Since the 1920s, at the emergence of modern artist, their expressive talents had a wider range of themes which was manifested by addressing various issues in the society. Refer to Sani (2010).

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APPENDIX I

RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE ARTIST

The following interview questions are posed to guide the study of Ben Ibebe's paintings from 1990-2010

(1) Full Name?

(2) Date of Birth?

(3) Place of Birth?

(4) Mention the schools you attended (primary, secondary and university)

(5) What motivated you into studying art?

(6) What influenced you into taking painting as a career?

(7) When or how did you discover your talent?

(8) Who encouraged you into studying painting?

(9) When did you actually start painting?

(10)What is your style of painting?

(11) What techniques do you adopt while painting?

(12)Precisely, when did you start exhibiting?

(13)How many solo exhibitions have you staged?

(14)How many joint exhibitions have you attended?

(15) What kind of statement do you make in your paintings (Are the Paintings thematic?)

(16) What is your source of inspiration and philosophy as a painter?

(17) Do you delve into other specialty of art apart from painting? If yes mention them.

(18) Do you really accept criticisms of any sort?

(19) Mention names of modern Nigerian artists whose works or styles have influenced you.

(20) Have you received any commission?

(21) What is the level of patronage from Nigerians and foreigners?