

Abstract

It is crucial to note that each artist has a style which makes him/her different from other artists. This style is the artist's identity as well as his signature. It is on this note that this paper focuses on aesthetic analysis of Kefas Nenpunmun Danjuma's painting style (technique). It is important to note that, for an artist to possess or create a style, personalities, experiment, experiences, techniques and practice may have contributed to the final style as is the case with Kefas. The analysis has brought to limelight Kefas Danjuma's style. His approach to rendering human figures by using expressive brush strokes to depict them and create a misty or foggy motif in his works sets him apart from his contemporaries. It is also discovered that the style of an artist in his works is as a result of his environment. Kefas Nenpunmun was discovered to be consistent in his style of painting not changing with the changing tide of the economic plight in the country. In conclusion, the paper comes up with recommendations which include projection of the artist and his art works for public enlightenment. Students or potential artists are encouraged to study the artist's modes of work in order to develop their own unique styles. The artist's style and media in painting can be discourse for art historians and scholars.

Keywords: Kefas, Aesthetics, Style.

Introduction

The stylistic expression of an artist is an intensely personal art form. The expressionist artist strives to convey his personal feelings about the object painted, rather than merely record his observation of it. Thus, in order to achieve maximum impact on the viewer, representational accuracy is sacrificed in favour of, for example, strong outlines and bold colours. Compositions tend to be simpler and more direct, and are often characterized by thick impasto paint, loose, freely applied brushstrokes, and occasional symbolism. The message is all-important.

Styles in art, are determined by the realities of a particular environment. In other words, stylistic expression or its evolution has been influenced largely by the ideological thoughts of such a society and its socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances of that particular time (Duniya, 2009). Egonwa (1994) posits that,

The stylistic tendency demonstrated on an artwork is determined largely by the environment in which it is created. The ideology which rules the artist, the subject matter being addressed, the media, techniques and tools of art production which depend on training, are combined mould which gives character to the artwork. Styles therefore, can only be static if these factors so remain.

In addition, the consistency of the artist's practice is also part of the factors that contributes to his stylistic expression and on that, carve a niche for himself.

Schapiro (2017) defined artistic style or expression as a constant form-and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expressions - in the art of an individual or group. In art history, we are interested in styles of individual artists, groups (often called 'schools') of artists, of a time period, a culture, or even a place. To distinguish and define a style/stylistic expression, one needs to find its "constant form," that is, one needs to identify shared characteristics of several works. The shared characteristics fall in the categories of formal elements, subject matter, media, techniques, and even mood or idea expressed.

On the other hand, aesthetics according to Danto (2009), is a branch of philosophy concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness. Aesthetics also deals with the question of whether such qualities are objectively present in the things they appear to qualify, or whether they exist only in the mind of the individual; hence, whether objects are perceived by a particular mode, the aesthetic mode, or whether instead the objects have, in themselves special qualities-aesthetic qualities. Criticism and the psychology of art, although independent disciplines, are related to aesthetics. The psychology of art is concerned with such elements of the arts as human responses to color, sound, line, form, and words and with the ways in which the emotions condition such responses. Criticism confines itself to particular works of art, analyzing their structures, meanings, and problems,

comparing them with other works, and evaluating them. These aspects of stylistic expression and aesthetics on Kefas Danjuma's selected paintings are what this paper seeks to look at.

The department of Fine Arts of Ahmadu Bello University is a ground where several artists are trained with the freedom of expression which gives the artists the avenue to discover their style or uniqueness in the art world and the proper medium of expression. In line with this, the unique style or manner of an artist, especially a painter comes to term with his time style. He synthesizes the knowledge acquired from other painters or artists as well as his own perceptions, imagination and sense of design and makes them into visual pieces through the use of a medium, which will alternately constitute his individual or unique style. Kefas Nenpunmun Danjuma (late) who is rated high among the products of the justification, with his painting will be looked at. The choice of the selected artist is based on the fact that, there is little or no written record or published or unpublished about him as other professional artists of his time.

About the Artist

Who is Kefas Nenpunmun Danjuma? Kefas Nenpunmun Danjuma was born on 13th of October, 1958 to the Danjuma family in Vom, Plateau state. He was an only child to his parents. Kefas had his early education at St. Peter's Primary school (1964-1970) and St. Jalat Primary school (1971-1972). The artist in his early days used charcoal to produce drawings on the walls and with his friends visited the ponds to get clay to sculpt guns, table, pots and many other objects for play. These were the starting point for the artist in the art world. During his secondary school days, at the St. John College, Jos (1972-1976), Kefas was strongly inspired by late Prof. Lucas Bentu and Mr. H.T Agbogu. These teachers were the ones that gave him the firm foundation to venture into art. At the same time, because of the structure of the school where he attended, just like late Chief Aina Onabolu who started with copying from art magazines and newspapers, Kefas did same but studied more of Rembrandt Vijn's paintings and others as well. This could be the reason for the calm atmosphere in his works yet active or action-based in stroke effects. He obtained his first degree in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1987 through direct entry, where he graduated with a First Class. He later enrolled for Masters in Fine Arts in the same department in 1991. Kefas was one of the pioneering members of the Nogh-Nogh Art group. Although a Nogh-Nogh artist, his works are less radical in expression compared with the other members of the group. His works depict freedom of expression that satisfies the artist not the crowd as a result of the training he has received from the aforementioned prestigious institution. He had his doctoral studies in the same Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in year 2009 where he finished as an Art Historian. This was different from his field because at the time of his doctoral pursuit, the painting section had yet to come up with the Ph.D programme in studio art. He lectured in the same institution till his death on 4th of December, 2016.

The Artist's philosophy / styles

For many modern painters, human figure or form has lost its thrill as a subject matter claiming or declaring that the renaissance artists had achieved all that could be achieved with the human figures. His subjects are well known and perfectly understood. The figures do not show much affluence as such but look satisfied with their way of life. The artist's experience or inspiration for his paintings is usually derived from his neighborhood as every artist has something that he or she draws his or her inspiration from. The surfaces of Kefas paintings show a mastery of his technique of rapid brush strokes on close observation and highly skilled manipulation of a wide range of colours that are warm and cool to give a serene atmosphere as portrayed in figure I, titled *the suitors*.

Other professional colleagues of the artist like Jari (1992) narrates the techniques explored by Kefas Danjuma. He says;

Kefas is a painter whose technique explores the synthesis of form and space. It involves initially the careful modeling of a form usually a human figure. The whole painting space is then painted in rapid strokes of different lines. Eventually both the human forms and the dark tones contribute in making up the painting.

The explanation given by Jari, could be seen in the Plate I, *the suitors*. In a similar vein, Duniya (2006) postulates that his paintings explore the combusive venturous and alluring expressions that human faces and cultures exhibit. According to Duniya (2006), Kefas experimented lately with facial moods as a reflection of human state of the mind. This is true as this is observed in the painting, titled, *the suitors*. It was also observed that the artist deliberately applies brush strokes with some sort of violent approach and obstruction in his paintings. The essence of this is to basically highlight the theme of gloom, which is aesthetically pleasing to the eyes or to the viewer. This unique technique of

his, could be as a result of the environment where he was brought up or taught or even from his background. The current plight of modern Nigerian art is such that, art works are produced by artists whose training, exposure, experiences and influences are of wide range. Akolo (1993) observes that modern Nigerian artists are of different categories, ranging from those trained under the apprenticeship background, the experimental ones and the self-taught. Thus the complexity that is today the nature of modern Nigerian art is indeed derived from the training that produces these artists. Nevertheless, while Akolo's categorization of these artists is educating, he did not give details on how each of these artists were trained and the type of impartation witnessed today. Could it be ascertained that the art being produced today came as a result of the artist's background training only? Egonwa (1994) seems to provide the answer to this question when he posits that most times, the environment in which the art is practiced determines the type of art being produced.

Environment in this sense can include political, cultural, social and economic environment. Some or all of these environmental factors can influence the production of art. For instance, Onabolu's style of art came about on the scene during the political era but Ogbechie (2003) notes that Onabolu's western style came as a result of being challenged by the westerners as at the time of the political period. In the same vein, Okoli (2012) reveals his observations about art of Kefas:

A lot of has changed in recent on the definitions of art and the artist, but what happens sacrosanct is the role of the artist as social commentator, entertainment, whistle blower, priest etcetera. The artist, owing this much to his society, cannot but maintain these productions, which are, in itself, a complete language. Kefas fits into this mould of special talented artists, who own and originate their own language to communicate with their audience. Conservatively speaking, Kefas' paintings over the years have revealed his major artistic trait of being a detailer. Detail not in the sense of microscopic details, but as an artist, he dwells more on close-ups of human and animal forms. His brush strokes might appear to negate this idea, because of the way he dribbles his brush on the canvas and achieving a near cloudy façade in his paintings. At a certain point in my viewing of his work, I began to think that having been born of Ngas parents, and permanently misty Ngas weather, Kefas is just a natural product of his environmental pedigree. The high altitude that his homeland is posited in Plateau state makes it one of the highest land points in Nigeria. At certain times of the year, the whole environment is covered with mist, making visibility difficult. It is my strong belief that this is what has informed Kefas' style over the years. He allows colours to reflect and interact with the particles of the fog, such that, his figures, both animal and human, permanently appear to be emerging from a matrix of fog. This approach had become manifest in all his paintings in the 1990s, recently it now appears as if more dense cloud is taking over the artist's works.

Okoli (2012) further reveals in same vein that in as much as, there are some paintings of his , on display today, with some lucidity of figures as seen in some or most of his paintings.

The Artist's works



**Figure I. Kefas Danjuma, "The Suitors", Oil on canvas, 152cmx122cm, 2015.
Source: Ifeanyi Ejiofor**

In figure I, titled, *the suitors* the painting is created in oil on canvas dated 2015. The painting is composed of only one female figure rendered in a realistic figure that is not centralised like most portraits. The figure appears to be deliberately placed on the left hand side of the painting surface. At

the same time, the artist stylishly balanced the work with dark brush strokes of various colours on the upper part of the right side of the canvas. The artist reveals that he loves yellow and its different shades/tints. This is a fact evident in this painting. The predominant colours of the painting are yellow, yellow-ochre, orange, burnt sienna, brown, green, white, burnt umber and crimson red.

As earlier mentioned, the figure, (female) is represented gracefully at the far left handside of the canvas. The female figure is shown to be well dressed in a hijab. On close observation of the dark strokes, it is observed that there appears to be other figures that are shown standing at the background. The figures faces are not revealed but are depicted in a manner that suggests that they seem to be gazing and admiring the lady who is the central focus of the painting. The artist further explains that, in this painting he intentionally decided to use various strokes of colours to represent each male figure. The different colours used in the surrounding background of the painting surface, is deliberate on the part of the artist. Each vertical stroke imbued in a unique hue is representative of the various kinds and dynamic “suitors” that are trying to woo the lady who is the centre of attention in both the painting and the minds of the suitors.

The half smile on the face of the female figure suggests the young woman’s awareness to the attention she is receiving from her suitors and also to the fact that she has come of age to be married or sought after. The general atmosphere of the painting is a testament to the manner in which “northerners, especially men propose to a lady they want to marry”.



Figure II. Kefas Danjuma, Plaiter, Oil on canvas, 152cmx122cm, 2015.
Source: Ifeanyi Ejiofor

Plate II, is composed of two female figures that are busy. This painting is in the painter’s custody and the size is 152cm x 122cm. In this painting, it is worthy to note how the artist used different brilliant and dark colours to strike a great balance within the picture surface thereby creating strong contrast. Colours used include yellow, white, ochre, red, burnt umber, green, blue, brown, pink, viridian green, some gray and orange. All these are skillfully utilised in the painting to create a well balanced composition.

The composition depicts two female figures whom the artist describe as his two daughters engaged in plaiting. The older child is represented seated on a small stool plaiting the younger one’s hair who is seated on the floor of the sitting room. The older one’s left hand holds the younger one’s head in an attempt to adjust it and put it in the perfect position in order to plait comfortably while the younger sister’s head is supported on her knees, and her hands stretched forward perhaps in an attempt to gain balance while seated. The elder sister’s face appears very focused on her work in order to bring out the beauty in her work and her legs spread out a bit for her younger one to sit well.

The artist uses a variety of brilliant and vibrant hues on the right side of the painting, while the left side displays an array of dark colours that have been masterly applied in a bid to to create perspective within the sitting room of the artist. The “plaiter” as suggested by the artist, is shown a bolder and stronger manner than the younger sitted figure in a bid to show a sense of perspective and depth as well a action within the picture surface. The positioning of the figures as well as the movement of feet and hands create a visual feeling of activity and anticipation; perhaps an atmosphere of preparation for something festive or celebrating, which is usually a just cause to be adorned.

This painting gives one an insight into the female world in the aspect of beautification or adornment. One can imagine that at such a tender age in the lives of the children, the idea of adorning themselves is already developing. It is also a business that most ladies and very few men are engaged in, in several parts of the country. Each plaiting, possess diverse styles with symbols that may mean something which are for a specific purpose. This work of Kefas informs the onlooker that the artist

has a deep interest in the synthesis of form and its surrounding space. What may be evident is the artist's fascination with faces as a means of making social commentaries about everyday ordinary people and the activities they engage in.



Figure III: Nomadic couple, 2012, oil on canvas, 152x122cm.
Source: Ifeanyi Ejiofor

In figure III, titled *Nomadic Couple* showcases the beauty of the Fulani as nomadic people. The painting composition consists of two heads, suggested to be a couple. There is an employment in the following pigments which stand out in the painting creating effectively a play of balance of contrast. Colours used in the work include blues of different shades, yellow, orange, yellow-ochre, purple, red, white, light brown and green. The use of such vibrant and dynamic palette is connotative of the fact that as people, the nomads have stood out amongst the cultures and tribes of Nigeria because of the unique pattern of life. However, transformation (modernization) has taken its toll on the appearance of these people, just like the other cultures that are found within the entity called Nigeria. The artist in this painting, used the fog (Okoli, 2012) style of rendition in depicting the nomadic people perhaps, to impress on the viewer the heavy decline of old cultures which cuts across all cultures. Some of the Fulani are still nomadic, but some have transited into sedentary life and mixed entirely with other members of the Nigerian populace in large cities and other urban centers. The employment of the fog motif, as Okoli (2012) popularly termed it, makes the figures in the *Nomadic couple* seem to diminish into the fog, signifying the withdrawal of an old tradition making way for a new one.

Conclusion

It is clear and should be noted that the environment is a significant constituent and one of the major factors that influence an artist. Also, from close observation of Kefas Danjuma's paintings, the circumstances of people, location, economy and other social factors, are central theme of his paintings. The artist has remained consistent and yet exponentially improved in both choice of subject matter, technique and philosophy. His imagery and probably symbolic meanings have advanced significantly.

For art to be successfully practised as a humanistic endeavour in the modern settings of Nigeria, it must be part and parcel of the social and cultural life of the country. For this to be possible, a thorough knowledge of African aesthetics, history and philosophy should be understood by artists and be adequately applied where necessary. These facts are evident in the works of Kefas Danjuma. His approach is typical of a classic and conservative modern day painter where draughtsmanship and demand are of utmost importance. In his facial studies, especially the ones on expressions of mood, Kefas explores the combusive, venturous and alluring expressions that such faces depict, while not minding their beauty or handsomeness as the case may be. Sometimes he paints directly from the tube just to create a textural effect on the canvas. His brush strokes are bold and emphatic, depicting boisterous knowledge of his materials and subject (human form).

The above ascertions can be seen in Danjuma's paintings analysed based on the aesthetic values of his subject's facial expressions. His preferred subject of expression in painting is the human form. Kefas focuses on creating a fusion of forms and space which he termed a synthesis of forms and space. Kefas Danjuma has addresses issues in his art works such as, the socio-cultural and socio-political state of everyday people thus; the documentation of such art works is necessary and relevant as they would serve as reference points for scholars, art students and the future generation.

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