

### Abstract

Postmodernism evolved in the 1970s as a reaction to modernism, advocating a negation of all core foundationalist theories found in the major disciplines of study of that period. Its ideas spring from the fringes of mainstream theories allowing people to identify with its nascent, futuristic nature, which embraces the thoughts of its society. Whereas modernistic styles are individualistic, postmodernist art looks outward at society's challenges and attempts proffering solutions.

Postmodernist art, an offspring of this thought-process, has imbibed topical and contemporaneous issues in society by using styles and conventions derived from a variety of sources which provide answers to its enquiries about the nature of the human being's quest for change. Its ideological stance, and methodologies best suit this paper schema, which examines the art practices of Bruce Onobrakpeya, Obiora Udechukwu, Olu Oguibe, Jerry Buhari, and Jacob Jari, who often tend to interrogate the social inequities found in Nigerian society. Apart from Oguibe, these artists have not called themselves postmodernist, neither does available literature, however this writer believes that their approach to visual representation is essentially postmodernist. This paper reviews their paintings from a postmodernist perspective, highlighting the nuances and techniques which label them postmodernist.

**Key words:** Postmodernism, Postmodernist Art, Interrogation, Nigerian Painting Practice, Society.

### Introduction

Postmodernism observes that the human being no longer lives under modernist conditions but within Postmodernity. According to the great sociological theorist, George Ritzer (2012), the postmodern world is affected by four major changes, which are: 1) global capitalism, 2) weakening of centralised state power structures which gives, rise of ethnic politics within nation states, 3) technological control of production and rise of consumerism, and 4) growth of liberationist social movements based on nationalism, race, social orientation, ethnicity, religion and environmentalism (Ritzer, 2012: 485).

Postmodernists reject the basic principle of modernist epistemology - which humans can, by the exercise of pure reason, arrive at a complete and objective knowledge of the world. They see certain inherent errors in this principle which repudiates the god-eye view of locating the observer outside the activity being studied, the grandnarrative that explains the world-view, foundationalism that prioritises certain rules as being always appropriate, universalism that ensures principles which govern the world, essentialism that limits people to core unchanging qualities, and representation that claims a person's view can accurately represent the world (Ritzer, 2012: 485).

In doing so, postmodernists have developed a powerful set of practices and vocabulary for interrogating the modernist claim of definitive statements. The alternative epistemological language postmodernists use are 1) decentering, which moves the understanding of unprivileged groups into the centre of discourse and knowledge, 2) deconstruction, which shows how concepts are historically constructed and contain contradictions and 3) difference, which explores any knowledge construct (Ritzer, 2012: 486).

Postmodernism as a style in architecture, art, literature, and criticism evolved in the 1970s as a reaction to modernism, the dominant theory of that period. Postmodernism was characterised by the adaptation of ideas and philosophical thrusts of periods or styles in a self-conscious way and had a purposeful rejection of the notion of high art as initially espoused by the Renaissance artists. Postmodernism emerged as an answer to the inability of modernism to face the criticisms central to the tenets of its discipline. Postmodernism advocates a total negation of all core foundationalist theories found in the major disciplines of study including the visual arts. In this wise therefore the ideas it bears are regarded from the fringes of mainstream theories since anyone could identify with its nascent nature, which seems to be in formation and often times a futuristic tenet still evolving and embracing the thoughts of its parent period (Gbaden, 2014: 3).

Postmodernist art is an offspring of this thought-process whereby it has embraced topical and contemporaneous issues in society by using styles and conventions derived from a variety of sources which provide answers to its enquiries about the nature of the human being's quest for change in

society. Whereas other modernistic styles are individualistic, targeted at programmes which promote the self. Postmodernist art looks outward at what challenges society is undergoing and proffers solutions. This is the justification for the inclusion in its art forms such recurrent social issues as justice, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and politics (Gbaden, 2014: 3).

It is under such a holistic postmodernist art framework that this writer has decided to pitch camp since the theory is suitable as a vehicle to transport the vibrant nature of conceptual ideas which the artists reviewed in this paper postulate. Its concepts, precepts, ideological stance, techniques, and methodologies best suit this schema which interrogates the social inequities found in Nigerian and conversely human society in general.

Postmodernism has also been found to be suitable for developing a conceptual framework which allows for postmodernist art to be examined. Postmodernism opens up vistas of undertaking a synthesis of vibrant ideas, forms, images, and above all a dynamic art practice to evolve. In this way both the way the paintings of the artists in focus are done and the possible meanings they convey and the approach to work ethic engaged in are viewed from under the lenses of postmodernism.

The scope of this paper covers the modern and contemporary Nigerian painting arena, essentially the scholarship that emanates from the Art Schools at Nsukka and Zaria as being those in the fore front of projecting postmodernist ideals in their painting practice. The painters in focus are Bruce Onobrakpeya (b.1932), Obiora Udechukwu (b.1946), Olu Oguibe (b.1964), Jerry Buhari (b. 1959), and Jacob Jari (1960). This assembly does not limit the scope of their art to a localised Nigerian axis since the issues they project, even though are routed from the context of Nigeria, are also current global issues which affect humans in general terms. All of these artists are internationally renowned, some actually live in the diaspora and apart from Bruce Onobrakpeya, are all professors in art institutions in Nigeria and in the United States of America.

The approach here is postmodernist and therefore an interrogative one which goes beyond a descriptive analyses and that imbibes the visual arts practice based research principles as advocated by Graeme Sullivan (2005), one of the best articulators of the theory of visual arts practice. According to him, "the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research"(Sullivan 2005: 5).

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this paper are to:

- i) examine the art practices of Bruce Onobrakpeya, Obiora Udechukwu, Olu Oguibe, Jerry Buhari, and Jacob Jari, who often tend to interrogate the social inequities found in Nigerian society;
- ii) classify their practice within a postmodernist art framework; and
- iii) provide literature for postmodernist art practice to thrive upon in contemporary Nigeria.

### **A Review of Artists and Artworks**

An in-depth analysis of the contemporary postmodernist art of painters, drawn essentially from two major art schools (Zaria and Nsukka) in Nigeria, form the core of the review. Only one work of each artist has been reviewed to give room for thorough critical interrogation. The writer believes that all other art inclinations and affiliations spring forth from these two schools and have now permeated the Nigerian art space. Whatever mega or minimal points of sameness, of difference, of convergence in the use of idea, media, and compositional constructs can be deduced from the review to inform the validity of the thesis postulated in this paper. Where necessary this presentation is done chronologically.

### **Contemporary Postmodernist Nigerian Painters**

#### **Zaria Art School**

Three artists of the Zaria Art School, consisting of Bruce Onobrakpeya (b.1932), Jerry Buhari (b. 1959), and Jacob Jari (b.1960), form the group being reviewed. To the estimation of this paper, they best epitomise those who embrace the postmodernist painting ideology. While Bruce Onobrakpeya represents the first generation of Nigerian artists, it is refreshing to know that he can shed traditionalism and delve into the conceptual tidal waves of contemporaneous art practice along with prominent artists of the present generation. Jerry Buhari creates art which engages topical issues of value to the Nigerian society. Jacob Jari is both an art historian and painter who combines his knowledge of theory and practice of art to train artists at his almatmater and also enrich his painting practice (Gbaden 2014: 49). Oloidi (2009) acknowledges:

it was the Zaria Art School that gave birth to nearly all the present art schools in Nigeria...Without doubt the word 'Zaria' has come to connote an artistic sanctum, a

place for creative, artistic and ideological reference and reverence in Nigeria. Zaria is a geography that was initially rejected by a few for fear of possible artistic sterility but which later became an Eldorado for creative, intellectual and ideological fertility (Oloidi, 2009: 3).

Quite early in its formative years, and with the establishment of the fecund Zaria Art Society in 1958, a crop of art students were able to rise up against the strict occidental, academy form of art instruction. According to the members of the society, the unarguably high standard curriculum did not “acknowledge or take into consideration the African or Nigerian cultural and artistic traditions” (Oloidi, 2009: 3). It is the fervour and aggressive artistic radicalisation of the art graduates of the first seven years, 1955-1962, their vision for art and society which prepared the foundation, and set the pace for the growth and development of modern and subsequently contemporary art in Nigeria.

The Zaria Art School is characterised by a conglomerate oeuvre of diverse stylistic works of art. There is the unique tendency towards engaging in realism, naturalism, stylisation, abstraction, romantic tinges with action painting, impressionism, imbibing of illusory imagery and admixtures of ethnic symbolism (Gbaden, 2014: 50). Themes that have captured the attention of Zaria artists include folklores which dominated the works of earlier artists, social, political, economic, religious. It is not unusual to encounter environmentally motivated paintings of rivers, landscapes, architectural edifices, cattle herdsmen and festivals such as the durbar springing forth from the canvas of the Zarianists. In essence the Zaria artist is best known for his or her ability to document the social life of the Nigerian person from a wide range of world views (Buhari, Ikpakronyi, Samuel, & Lamidi, 2009: 3).

#### **Bruce Onobrakpeya (b.1932)**

Bruce Onobrakpeya's entry into installation art came as a natural consequence of his explorations of Bini and Urhobo art forms and numerous excursions into plastography; a printing technique he invented in the 1960s while doing regular etchings. Okeke writes that the artist's sculptural columns and wall pieces are actually negative resins derived from casts of his plastographic experimental techniques. In *Shrine Set (Wall Hanging)* (Fig. 1) Onobrakpeya finds fulfilment in attaining “a complex symbolic form”. He incorporates into his installation Akan brass gold-weights, Fulani leather works and other assorted objects from diverse African cultures (Okeke, 1995: 51).



**Fig. 1, Bruce Onobrakpeya, *Shrine Set (Wall Hanging)*, plastocast plastograph, copper foil, bronze, plywood, steel, 305 x 305 x 183 cm, (Source: Okeke 1995:51)**

#### **Jerry Buhari (b.1959)**

Jerry Buhari is born in 1959 in Akwaya in Kaduna State, Nigeria, He 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 a perspective that is certainly postmodern in fabrication. A learned painter and professor, he may have been responsible for churning out a great percentage of painters from the stables of the Fine Arts Department in Zaria, where he has taught art for over two decades. Some of his former students are now fellow lecturers with him despite his mere 56 years of existence (Balogun, 2011: 28-30).

Much of Jerry Buhari's art is loaded with dense social commentary directed at the daunting social, economic, and political conditions in Nigeria. *Laundry 2* (Fig. 2), depicts one of his incursions into *site-specific* art practice. Here he bestrides the genres of painting and sculpture as he uses concrete sculptural techniques (stone) alongside painterly ones. The hard edge of sculpture is softened by pieces of printed fabric wrapped around huge stone boulders found on the River Gihon in Johnson, USA. This interrogation of a river as site of art work uses fabric elements that are true to his cultural

origins and familiar to his Nigerian audience who use printed fabric for their clothing and as veritable fashion statements.

This work resembles an African embracement of the values of the West to the detriment of their origins and roots. There is a mild link between this situation and the brain-drain syndrome Nigeria has suffered over the years. Does it not seem like an irony that it is in the West that Nigerians find room to express their talent the most significantly?



Fig. 2, Jerry Buhari, *Laundry2*, 2005, Stone and fabric in River Gihon Johnson VT., USA,  
(Source: [www.jerrybuhari.com](http://www.jerrybuhari.com))

### Jacob Jari (b. 1960)

Jacob Jat Jari was born on April 19, 1960 in Plateau State, Nigeria. He trained as a painter and art historian in the famous Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he has been teaching for over 18 years. In 2010 he rose to the rank of a Professor of Fine Arts. He is a founding member of the Aftershave International Artists' Workshop, and belongs to several other artists groups and art historical associations in Nigeria and abroad. A highly educated scholar abreast with the current developments in his discipline, Professor Jari attends exhibitions literally all over the world almost as a yearly routine. He is fascinated by the possibility of re-engaging discarded objects such as cornstalk, pieces of fabric and paper in creating art work. He thinks it would be wonderful if we human beings had a second chance to relive our lives all over again, such blissful opportunity as provided by the discarded objects he employs (ARESUA, 2008: 88).

*Farka* (Fig. 3) is taken from Jari's *Bullet Hole Series*, where he uses discarded fabrics of different colourations and designs and places 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 the human person, animals, or objects. Even though the artist does not directly say so, 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 dispensations. Thus while the fabrics get a new lease of life as aesthetically pleasing objects they still act as agents of subtle social commentary. These are all ways in which relationships are formed between object and subject to attempt piecing together the torn fabric of our social attire (Gbaden, 2014: 55).

This is what Jacob Jari says about his own work,

To reclaim has a deep meaning to me. My work tries to glorify those reclaimed from the brink. Usually they are the insignificant. My present series is called the bullet-hole series, created by fire and fabric, the leftover from the tailor...Every time I look at my work, each piece of fabric reminds me of someone I had seen in it. I have not stopped to wonder, maybe I should bring together all those represented to stand by the canvas or maybe I already have!(Cocoaarts.com).



Fig. 3, Jacob Jari, *Farka*, (Bullet Hole series), 2008, 'Fire' and Fabric on canvas, 70cm x 70cm,  
(Source: ARESUA 2008:90)

### **Nsukka Art School**

Two major artists of the Nsukka Art School have been reviewed to show that their evolving connections to the international art scene actually depict postmodernist posturing. Even though they are steeped in *Uli* as a point of departure for their hugely successful art, careers they have consistently accepted a synthesis of cultural relevance emanating from different art traditions which have value for them (Gbaden, 2014: 41).

*Uli* artists have embraced “change and development” as a basis for growth in their careers (Ottenberg, 1997: 155-179). Obiora Udechukwu (b.1946) keeps growing, moving in new directions, yet retaining certain persistent traits: the diversity of his media, a wide range of subjects, his use of *Uli* and *nsibidi*. He also expresses serious social concerns and is consistent in integrating past and present (Ottenberg, 1997: 110-153). Olu Oguibe (b.1964) has departed radically from his roots to embrace an internationalism that encapsulates diverse cultural and artistic trends to mould his personal painting idiom. These motivating values exhibited by the Nsukka artists are expressions of a postmodern ideal suited to an understanding of contemporary art practice in Nigeria (Gbaden, 2014: 48).

The German scholar Norbert Aas is quoted by Ottenberg as calling the Nsukka School artists “intellectual artists”. Earlier in the practice of their art, beginning with Uche Okeke, the Nsukka artist has not only stuck to producing art work but also takes part in discourse on art. Ottenberg (1997) said:

It is a message-oriented art, whether in its social and political form or its expression of cultural elements. The art talks to the viewer. And the quality of art criticism that these artists engage in is well known in Nigeria, heightened by its contrast with low level of art criticism often found in Nigerian newspapers and magazines. Although until recent years, scholars have written little about Africans’ own aesthetic criticism and judgment, these have certainly not been rare in indigenous cultures, albeit verbal rather than written, so that contemporary art evaluations have continuity with the past. Again, satirical political commentary has occurred among the Igbo and other Africans in masquerades, in other ritual, and through minstrels; a parallel exists with the Nsukka artists’ interest in political satire in their visual art. A variety of kinds of writing is common to these artists; print is a major avenue of communication about their art, their aesthetic viewpoints, and those of other artists. Their knowledge of African literature and poetry is often considerable.

If their art is intellectual, this does not mean that it is cold or distant. It is often passionate, expressing feelings and sentiments, at times less calculated than spontaneous in its production.

The Nsukka artists often view poetry and visual arts as allied fields, sometimes practicing both. They are minstrels of the written word as well as creating striking visual images, frequently developing similar themes in both fields...these artists have a broad range of art media and artistic interests(Ottenberg 1997: 110-153).

### **Obiora Udechukwu (b.1946)**

Obiora Udechukwu could be considered as one of the most visible Nsukka voices. Having started his training in Zaria in 1966, he was forced to move to Nsukka due to the reality of the Nigerian civil war. His early art is characterised by war imagery of amputees, refugees fleeing home, orphaned children and bombed out habitations. The colours in those paintings are earthy ochers, deep flaming crimsons, dark viridians and some amber blues. However a few years after the war ended he was able to commence on a fresh search for an enduring personal art idiom. He found this solace in the Igbo *uli* art form practiced by most women of eastern Nigeria (Okeke, 1995:56).

While studying under Uche Okeke at Nsukka, Udechukwu came to realise the potentials of this art form and adapted *uli*’s essence of elegance and sensitivity of line into his own form of expression. Combining aesthetics with his excellent grasp of draughtsmanship he set off on a trail of expression which has a lyrical tone. Okeke writes about this artist. His lines from then on became powerful vehicles for social commentary and visual poetry that drew their richness from the verses of Christopher Okigbo and Igbo oral poetry (Okeke, 1995:56).

Udechukwu’s art bears its universality and hence postmodernist posturing from his ability to incorporate art forms and aesthetics from different cultural backgrounds to enrich his art. He has used Chinese *li* calligraphy, where simplicity of form is emphasised. He learnt to adhere to the Chinese

gestural ink and brush technique practiced in *Tao* painting. He also incorporates the pictographic elements of the Efik *nsibidi* script into his art. These abilities coupled with his vast knowledge of African and Western cultures and aesthetics have shaped Udechukwu into a postmodernist artist able to adapt to the demands of most societies and peoples he come across on his journey through life.

At present he is a Dana Professor of Art at St. Lawrence University, Washington, but he frequently visits Nigeria. The photograph of the watercolour painting shown in Fig. 4 illustrates one of his current works. Even though done in watercolour, Obiora's classic medium of expression, he seems to have expanded his grasp of the sensitive line to embrace broader fields of expression using colour these days in profounder ways. Could this broad application of colour mean a return to the origins of *uli* artistic expression or an encapsulation of its vital essences? We are left with questions to probe our inner consciences and attempt finding solutions to problems of enduring human quests.



Fig. 4, Obiora Udechukwu, *In the Beginning*, 2005, watercolour, 20 x 13 in  
(Source: [www.skotogallery.com](http://www.skotogallery.com))

#### **Olu Oguibe (b.1964)**

Olu Oguibe, an Igbo, was born on October 14, 1964 in Aba, Nigeria. He received his first artistic experience from his father, a preacher, a former school teacher, a wood sculptor, and a sign painter. As has happened to so many others of his countrymen, Oguibe's life was disrupted by the Biafran War of 1967-70, but his family survived intact, and the artist later took part in traditional artistic activities in his home Igbo community. He studied Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka where he graduated in 1986 with First Class honours specialising in painting. That same year he was awarded several prizes for leading his graduating set as the best overall final year student of the whole university and hence the valedictorian. He began doctoral studies in art history and criticism before proceeding to the UK as a British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Scholar to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), of the University of London. In 1992, he received a PhD in art history for his thesis titled *Uzo Egonu: An African Artist in the West*.

A prolific poet, Oguibe won the 1992 All-Africa Christopher Okigbo Prize for Literature as well as honourable mention in the 1993 Noma Awards for publishing in Africa. Oguibe has exhibited his work in numerous major art shows, including personal shows in England, Germany, Australia, and Africa. Regarded as a leading postmodernist artist, he has shown his work in interzones, an international exhibit at the Kunstverein, Copenhagen, and in *Seven Stories about Modern Art* in Africa at Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. He has also done residencies at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, the ArchivGalerie, Friedberg, and in Sydney, Australia.

Olu Oguibe now lives, writes and works in the USA. He is a Professor of Art and African-American Studies and interim Director of the Institute for African American Studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. Oguibe is a senior fellow of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School, New York and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. He is also an art curator, and leading contributor to postcolonial theory and new information technology studies.

Quite unlike the other Nsukka artists who have chosen to elevate *Uli* stylistic tendencies to international acceptance, Oguibe distances himself from his previous identification with *Uli*, Nsukka and Nigeria. He writes, "An artist as transitory as myself would not fit into a style. I have referenced Uli, Nsibidi, Adinkra, Adire, Mbari, Dogon sculpture, Ndebele murals, San rock art, Maya



and Inca textile art, European abstract expressionism, postmodernism, social realism and conceptualism, in addition to my own forms and ideas” (Kasfir, 1999: 210).

Kasfirrelies and Simon Ottenberg suggest that this attitude is partly Oguibe’s conscious strategy to work through the implications of a collapse-of-history postmodernism. On another part it is likely to be the conscious exploration of new sources that characterize the trajectory of any inventive artist’s career (Kasfir, 1999: 210).

Oguibe’s *iPad prints* (Fig. 5) are deliberately created to negate the notions of *high art* which is enmeshed deep inside traditionalist principles of form and narrative. Here the artist does not attempt to portray any tangible phenomenon or historical reality. He simply makes art with an instrument of everyday usage which can be manipulated by just about anyone who is able to afford an apple iPad. The common aspect of the instrument of art does not have to be a brush stroking linen or canvas surfaces but actually just a phone, a common object. This has been transformed into a work place. The studio, which would have been a huge warehouse, littered with paintings, is compressed into a mere camera phone (Best, 2014@<http://today.uconn.edu>).



Fig. 5, Olu Oguibe, *iPad prints*, (Photo: Olu Oguibe),  
(Source: [today.uconn.edu](http://today.uconn.edu))

### The Analysis

Bruce Onobrakpeya did not have to embrace postmodernist ideals if he did not want to. But he did. Being among the first generation of modern Nigerian artists, he could have been excused if he just stayed back in his studio and produced art filled with mythological imagery and design motifs drawn from the cosmology of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. He chose instead to explore with ideas which make him constantly search for a vocabulary of expression that is dynamic, engaging, ever changing and socially relevant to contemporary human goals.

The nexus of engagement which involves the social space of humans, their environment, their social status, and their clothing made from African fabrics form the core of interest for Buhari in this study. His installation called *Laundry 2* (Fig. 2) is in simple compositional terms clothed stones floating on the Gihon River located somewhere in the United States. They are symbolic of the displacement the African finds when confronted with Western value codes. And even in an African context real engagements with contemporary failures by artists or social activists interested in creating change for the betterment of society does not auger well for the critics. They become estranged from society.

For Jacob Jari in his reviewed painting titled *Farka* (Fig. 3) the very use of such terms as *reclaim*, *brink*, and *left-over* by the painter himself suggest an immersion into the postmodern ethic of art representation which seeks to speak for the voiceless in society. They are on the fringes of life, wallowing in misery and need to be reabsorbed into society. They cannot speak out for themselves but rather require strong interventions. Jari offers them respite through his art. It is aimed at the elitist who decide how the poor in his native Nigeria should be governed.

Obiora Udechukwu’s watercolour painting titled *In the Beginning* (Fig. 4), has lost most obvious attributes of linearity which characterised his earlier art, except of course for the relentless marks he so consistently scratches onto his painted surfaces. One can however recognise a humanoid eye loosely placed on a cloudy face. His usual colours of fire (crimson red), sky (ultramarine blue) and earth (viridian green) are lucidly depictive of a certain kind of ritual taking place between the elemental forces of heaven and earth. Is that pot symbolising a sacrificial offering of appeasement? One cannot be sure. It seems as though the beard of the heavens are brushing against the vegetation of the earth. And probably the sacrificial pot offering may as well get consumed in the process. Or is it a

massive gargantuan tongue licking the awry wounds of humanity? This ambiguity in imagery is an obvious weapon of postmodernist art applied by Udechukwu to keep us anxious about the deeper meaning of his harmless looking painting. If the story were clearly told would the magic of uncertainty not be lost? It is in this way that Obiora retains the postmodernist ethos of condemning, even if in subtle ways, the self-arrogating and clearly defined methods of modernist art practice.

In analysing Oguibe's recent art titled *iPad prints* (Fig. 5), one gets to encounter a person that epitomises the postmodernist artist. That apparent revolt from his *uli* origins is a hallmark of the postmodern ideal where ideology itself becomes the very paradigm to be done away with. While other members of the Nsukka School try to preserve some form of African essence in their art, some level of *uli* fervour, Oguibe discards them almost completely and embraces a postmodern ethos of the accumulation of world truths; synthesising them and making use of only the most essential for his art. The truth is, his art has not died but remained relevant. Even in the example shown here, notice how radically far apart from the other Nsukka artists the choice of medium characterises this artist's oeuvre.

### Conclusion

Apart from Oguibe, who has acknowledged having delved into postmodernist art, neither, Onobrakpeya, Buhari, Jari or Udechukwu has been definitively labelled postmodernist in available literature on modern and contemporary painting practice in Nigeria. What this paper attempted is a scrutiny of the possibility that since their practice is so replete with imagery, insinuations, and concerns for the plight of the human person, essentially even of African, albeit Nigerian origin; and their art derives motivation from such diverse range of world-wide political, social, economic, philosophical leanings; they could appropriately be labelled postmodernist Nigerian painters.

They are the fore-guards and avowed vanguards of an emerging era of artists who are conscious of their environment, the scourging social climate and stinging political turmoil of a series of lost grips on Nigeria's governance. Udechukwu's sojourn in the United States of America has not led to a dwindling interest in his country's affairs. Whether Oguibe depicts an international art or not does not repress the fact that he is first Nigerian before being American, and that the voice of reason does not know racial, intellectual or geographical boundaries.

The artists in diaspora feel the similar loss of values that those on the continent feel. This is what is expressed in the paintings reviewed in this paper, that it does not matter where you live. The cold bites, the sun waves scourge your skin, the rain pours down from the sky and waters the flowers in the wild. The painter gets to depict ills which attempt to change this natural equilibrium.

It is plausible to question the focus on such well-established painters as expressed in this paper. Has scholarship on their art not been exhaustively treated? A simple answer suffices. That they are able to transit from an education steeped in modernist tradition to an embrace of postmodernist ideals and values is commendable. The evidence of their new found ethical values are to be found in the art of their students who reside both in Nigeria and in the diaspora. The subject of the paintings and other art forms their prodigious students engage in already form the crux of other academic research this author is engaged in. It seemed wise however, to begin the engagement from the very roots of the tradition where their formation emanated. And essentially too this being a homage to the tutelage passed onto our generation by these forebears it was necessary to focus on their art and scholarship, even if these few pages are insufficient to render an exhaustive discourse.

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