

AN ANALYSIS OF EMMANUEL WESLEY OKACHI'S SELECTED COMMISSIONED WORKS

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Abstract

Emmanuel Wesley Okachi is a product of the famous Zaria Art School who specialises in sculpture and has produced quite a number of commissioned works. Emmanuel has also participated in number workshops, solo and group exhibitions. The artist's sculptures were among several bodies of artworks executed in Nigeria but unfortunately have not received adequate documentation through scholarly review. It is as a result of this, that this paper specifically makes an attempt to project and brings to the understanding of the general public his commissioned sculptures. In doing that, Emmanuel's overview history is given, exhibitions attended and commissioned works executed were also appreciated. Lastly, seven of his commissioned sculptures were analysed.

Keywords: Analysis, Commission, Sculptures, Works, Wesley Okachi, Contemporary Nigerian Art

Introduction

In response to the growth of contemporary Nigerian art, it is deemed worthwhile that the records of contemporary artists be documented for easy findings in the nearest future as Lawal (2006) remarks that, "in contemporary Nigeria, many artists have explored their emotions in visual forms and have played significant role in the development of artistic expressions in the country". Kasfir (1999) affirms that, "the striking different attitude towards facture, replication from one form to another is inexactly and variation a natural occurrence". He explains that, "the actual process of making artworks among different types of contemporary artists across the country reflects not only their modes of training, but also their experience of patronage and the degree to which they are familiar with art and art making beyond their own communities". Efemena (2000, 2001) states "that, individuals exist in given environments which consist of body, space, and time. As they exist in the environment they imbibe certain traits which spell them out as given entities in the environment". Efemena states that, "these entities also distinguish themselves from those of other environment by the physical items of identity which may be natural or man-made forms. The works of art that are created in a given environment often reveal those environmental traits of those individuals". And such traits, performance by accumulated experience of putting knowledge to practice enhance giving an identity which Emmanuel Wesley Okachi as one of such individuals has exhibited.

Emmanuel Wesley Okachi's name may not be known to a larger population in the contemporary Nigerian art fora, this could probably be as a result of lack of previous scholarly research on him as well as his artworks. It would interest one to note that "Wesley" (as he is mostly called) is a multi-faceted artist who ventures into sculpture, painting, graphics (sign boards, logo designs) and roundabout/fountain constructions. He explores several materials at the discretion of the commission given to him by his clients

which include: fiber glass, resin, metal, concrete, and colours. Wesley (2006) acknowledges that “two factors inspire him profoundly “*nature*” and “*life*”. They are his greatest sources of inspiration and his philosophy on art has always been representational. He is of the opinion that, art works should be allowed to speak for itself and then the audience to appraise it afterwards.

In view of the preceding, the need to review and document Okachi and his artworks is therefore necessary and imperative. Also owing to the fact that, there is no written document or comprehensive scholarly study carried out on the artist and his artworks with specific mention to his commissioned works. The only available literature at hand is that found in the Art Staff Exhibition catalogue (2016) containing his biography, information gotten from an interview conducted with the artist as well as his curriculum vitae. Others are information gotten from his colleagues. Hence the need for a review and documentation of the artist’s works has become necessary for posterity. It is hoped that this attempt to review, analyze, and interpret some selected artworks with trace to the educational background, source of inspiration and styles of Emmanuel Wesley Okachi will go a long way to create a better understanding of the artist and his contributions to the growth of contemporary Nigerian art.

Historical Background of Emmanuel Wesley Okachi and His Commissioned Works

Emmanuel Wesley Okachi was born on the 19th of November, 1964 in Ibaa, Emohua local government area of River state, Nigeria. He attended St. Andrew Primary School, Diobu Mile 1 Port Harcourt from 1971 to 1977 but couldn’t sit for secondary school entrance exams due to ill health not until 1978 when he eventually sat at St. Thomas Primary School, Diobu Mile 2 Port Harcourt. On successful completion, he proceeded to Government Secondary School Borokiri in Rivers state, for his secondary education from 1978 to 1983. Meanwhile he had started practicing art right from his primary school days where he practiced drawings for his classmates and a pen or pencil was given to him as a reward. Okachi was also encouraged by his mother who happens to be a class room teacher then by providing him with drawing books, papers and pencils to draw. In secondary school he was chosen by his art teacher Mr. Amah to represent his school in company of two other students in a state wide competition at the cultural centre, unfortunately the trio did not participate in the competition because it was done a day after their arrival at the venue of the competition.

He continued his artistic pursuit by enrolling into the River State College of Education Rumuolumeni Port-Harcourt- Nigeria in 1986, where he obtained his National Certificate of Education (NCE) in 1990. While a student at College, he had a studio which he was into card making and graphic design between the years 1989-1991. He later applied and secured admission into Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Department of Fine Arts) in 1991 and graduated in 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A HONS) degree in Fine Arts specializing in Sculpture. In 1996 he secured admission for his second degree, and in 2000 he completed

and obtained the Master of Fine Arts degree (MFA sculpture) and a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Art History with Bias to Culture and Tourism from 2010 to 2015 respectively.

According to Okachi (2016), he loves realism as his own style of his expression the reason is that when one is acquainted with it, it will be easy manipulating other styles. However, in his commissions, he goes by his client's specifics. Nature and life are his source of inspiration and the materials exploited by him include: fiber, glass, resin, metal, cement, and oil colours among others. He is also into graphics, painting, and round about construction but partial to painting than sculpture for the single reason which he states that it is easy making paintings compared to a sculpture. At present, Okachi dwells more on commissions.

Okachi's commissioned works are many and varied, hence they are too numerous to be recalled in their entirety within the context of this paper. However, some include, Portrait bust of Bulama Biu, Nigerian Defense Academy (NDA) (1999), Designed and construction of Gombe State University logo, Gombe State (2003), Designed the conference of Alumni of Nigerian University's logo, Abuja, (2004), Constructed the Division of Agricultural Colleges logo, Samaru, Zaria (2010), Designed the Denki Scotts limited company logo, Zaria (2010), Designed the A K Bello Limited Company Logo Kano, Kano state (2011), "Convergence" sculpture situated in Gombe state University, Gombe (2011), Constructed the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services Suites Logo (NAERLS) (2012), and 142 Paintings (oil on canvas) commissioned by NAERLS (2012).

He has participated in several joint exhibitions nationally and internationally, attended many workshops at various capacities which include Curator: Resource Mobilization Seminar and Photo Exhibition, Organised by Ahmadu Bello University Alumni Association, Zaria, Assembly Hall, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (2001), Database Management: For Optimal Legislative Delivery. A two-day workshop organised by the National Assembly, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Merit House, Agunyi Ironsi Way, Maitama Abuja (2007), and Legislative Aides Retreat: A two-day retreat organised by the National Assembly, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008).

He is currently a lecturer with the Fine Arts Department of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He joined the teaching staff of the Department in 2002 as an Assistant Lecturer and risen to the rank of Reader in 2015. He has held several positions among which include: President, Association of Fine Arts students (1994-1995) and National Union of Rivers State Students in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria 1994-1995 respectively, Deputy Alumni Officer of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria from 2002-2006, Head of Sculpture Section of the Department of Fine Arts 2011-2015, an Adjudicator at the Abuja National carnival in 2009. Wesley is also an Art Consultant to the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai Niger state (2006). He is a legislative consultant to Distinguish Senator George Thompson Sekibo at the Senate Wing of the National Assembly from 2006-2008. Okachi can be seen as a Painter, Sculptor, Graphic artist, Constructor, Instructor and Administrator. Okachi is married and blessed with four children.

Analysis of Commissioned Works

This segment of the paper focuses on the analysis of Okachi's commissioned works. The authors have purposely selected and analyzed six (6) works produced by the artist between 2000 and 2010 which include busts, fountains, crests, maze and rhinoceros of some institutions and organizations.



Plate 1: Solomon Lar, Fiber-glass, 2000, 61cm

Plate I shows the portrait of *Solomon Lar*, and the medium used for executing the work is fiber glass. It is a bust of a one-time politician and first civilian Governor of Plateau state. The first thing that draws one's attention is the elongated cap which is synonymous to the personal style of Solomon Lar. The portrait displays the use of lines and planes that show the round and texture surface of the cap. The work shows the successful usage of line and geometric shapes which can be seen from the cap to the neck.

The green palm leaves and others at the background symbolize the success story of his political career before death took him away. Symbolically, the calm twisting repose of the face can be said to symbolize



Plate II: Pa James Folorunsho Adekunle Bust, Fiber-glass, 165cm, 2000, Ilesha, Osun, State. Photograph by: Okachi

Portrait bust of Pa James Folorunsho Adekunle is rendered in realism as shown in plate II. It is precisely 5x5ft (165) cm in height and was rendered in fiber-glass in 2000. The sculptural piece is found in the home of the subject (Pa James Folorunsho Adekunle) in Ilesha, Osun State, Nigeria. It was commissioned by Professor Femi Adekunle. The Sculpture details the face of an aged person judging from the folds and

wrinkles on the figure's face. It is not out of place to say that the portrait is of an adult, signifying age and wisdom. The artist applied rough texture on the attire which complements the smooth face and neck of the person, the work shows the figure in a posture with a smile on the figure's face looking straight ahead, the bent cap of the subject forms unique draperies which gives the cap some stylish folds. Drapery on the big gown 'Agbada' on the other hand is clearly visible.



Plate III: Northern Knot Fountain Sculpture, Metal, 2002, 666cm x 429cm, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria Samaru Campus Main Gate Round-about, Zaria.

Plate III is the Northern knot fountain which is located at the main gate round-about of the Ahmadu Bello University main campus Samaru, Zaria is executed in metal and concrete in 2002. The fountain is in five layers which include the Arewa logo which is popularly known as Northern Knot. The central composition atop the fountain is composed of two Northern knot logos in free standing position criss-crossing each other. Thus, creating a four part of play of two logos with the figure fifty (50) on it. The northern knot is a common symbol in northern Nigeria which is commonly used in most of the wall/mural decorations done in most parts of northern Nigeria. It is believed to symbolize power and authority. The logos are mounted on three circular shapes which are joined by a pillar and with space in-between them and connected to them are electrical wires and bulbs which illuminate the environment at night to add to the aesthetics and appreciation of the work. The first and second circular shapes are joined at the edge with the third centralized giving the fountain an asymmetrical balance. The base is made slopping down to the edge creating a space to hold water inside the fountain.



Plate IV: Double-Faced Logo, Metal, 79cmx91cm, 2002, Ahmadu Bello University, Stadium, Samaru Zaria.

In this Plate IV is titled *Double-Faced Logo* is a commissioned logo, green and white colours are used by the artist in rendering the design. The simplicity of the whole design in its entirety makes the logo look

appealing and interesting to the onlooker. The background of the logo including the three corners edged like floral ornamentation around the Arabic lettering and the symbol of the northern knot are rendered in green colour. Unlike other languages, Arabic scripts begin from the right hand side and move to the left. The Arabic lettering here is rendered in white there by complimenting the entire background. The Arabic vowels sound around the letterings gives the viewer and reader the actual meaning and pronunciation of the script. Its translation is “Jami’atu Ahmadu Bello” meaning, Ahmadu Bello University. And above the Arabic write-up is the common Hausa motif known as “The Northern Knot” or “The *Dagi* Emblem” which is said to symbolize power and authority. Looking at the interlocking writings, it is observed that they are almost of the same thickness. They act as the harmonious force binding all the letters together, and at the same time creating a visual thrill in the work. The writing is characterized with varying thick and thin lines which interweave into each other. The lines slope and ascend, passing through coiled shapes. The letters are composed of small circle and strokes of vowel lines which give adequate spacing that makes the work simple and interesting.



Plate V: Adamawa State University Maze Mubi, Bronze, 2003, 164cm

The image presented in Plate V was commissioned by the Adamawa State University Mubi, Adamawa state. The mace is made of bronze and simply ornamented. The mace is golden in colour and it is incorporated with about five (5) rings throughout the length of the pole with the tip of an arrow shape. It also bears the University’s official logo at the top. The logo of the University is in a circular shape and has in it the inscription “Adamawa State University, Mubi”. From the inner circle is the symbol of a book in white and green colour and pen which represents knowledge. Just a little above the book is a symbol like that of the sun yellow in colour which can be said to represent loyalty. Again, a little above it is a motif of the northern knot rendered in white directly above the sun. One of the functions that the mace serves is a symbol of authority in the sense that the university uses it as part of its ceremonial process of conferring

degrees during convocations and other special events as well as academic processions. It is carried by a special University official called a beadle.



Plate VI: Rhino Sculpture, Fiber- glass resin, 2010, 381cm x 152cm, Nigerian Army 3rd Division, Rukuba Barracks, Jos, Plateau State.

The work presented in Plate VI was commissioned by the Nigerian Army 3rd Division Rukuba Barracks, Jos, Plateau state in 2010. The medium used in depicting the Rhino sculpture was in fiber-glass resin which is patinated in red, black and white colours. The left leg raised up and pushing forward can be said to symbolize the movement of the army without retreat during war. Similarly, the head of the animal is focused to the front and the general posture of the animal can be said to be the typical position of the force on duty ready to achieve the purpose for which the posture is made. The Rhinoceros being an aggressive animal is used to symbolize the attitudes of the army that act aggressively to other human beings. It is presumed that the colours used symbolize aggressiveness. The red, symbolically signifies danger and power, while black stands for sorrow or death. On the other hand white shows their peace even with their kind of attitude.

Conclusion:

The review and documentation of Emmanuel Wesley Okachi's commissioned works began with a highlight on modern art as it relates to the artist under review. A brief historical background of the artist was made and it was established that, Emmanuel was born 19th Nov, 1964, he hails from Rivers state, in Nigeria and he has undergone formal art education training from primary to tertiary level. This had led him to become a lecturer with the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and also a practicing visual artist. In the course of articulating this paper, it has been clearly proven that Okachi's commissioned works are mostly made up of designed and constructed logos for institutions and organizations. The authors have also observed and established that Okachi's source of inspiration is nature and life. The review also revealed that his commissioned works are functional in the sense that they serve both aesthetic and communicative purposes.

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