

AN ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS OF SATI PANSHAK YILWAT

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Abstract

Zaria Art School is majorly known for its theory of Natural Synthesis, which has to do with the merging of western art style with the indigenous African art style in rendering an art work. Most people are unaware that, other art styles exist in Zaria Art School apart from Natural Synthesis theory, thus, this paper brings to bare the paintings of Sati Panshak Yilwat, who is an upcoming Zaria artist. The paper analyses Sati's paintings in an attempt to put in proper perspective his contributions to contemporary Nigerian art. It is unraveled that the artist is a humanist landscape and an abstract painter. His landscape paintings are graphically rendered, while his human compositions are either rendered from the rear or are completely reduced to geometric shapes to form abstractions.

Keywords: Landscape, Painting, Colour, Realism, Abstraction, Scene, Theme, Style

Introduction

The Fine Arts Department of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, is one of the oldest art schools in Nigeria, and it has contributed significantly to the training of contemporary artists in Nigeria. Using the theory of natural synthesis postulated by the earliest graduates of the school, the products of the school have been able to distinguish themselves in the use of materials, exploration of styles, forms and techniques (Saliu, 2008). There is a collective and an individualistic style in the works of the products of Zaria art school. The collective style is what Mount (1973) describes as being characterized by elongation of forms, with elegant northern architecture and human figures, and their landscapes, most at times reflect the grassland and savannah vegetation of the North. The individualistic styles are what distinguish one Zaria artist from the others, and these can be observed in their respective works.

Zaria art school is a school that gives students freedom of expression, which has culminated into various experimentations, which took place in the school (Mu'azu, 2008). Also, this freedom of expression given to Zaria art students has made many of them to be successful in their chosen art profession which have made them to carve a niche for themselves. Examples of such artists are Bruce Onobrakpeya, Kaltume Bulama Gana, Kolade Oshinowo, Yusuf Grillo, among others.

Presently, a new generation of artists are emerging from Zaria Art School, amongst these new artists are Sati Panshak Yilwat, Ajayi Oluwaseyi, Umar Bukar, and many more. There is a high level of vibrancy in their works, and these upcoming artists have developed what is recognizably a unique individualized style as it is apparent in their works. There is also a collective style, which cuts across all of these artists, and an adventurous exploration of styles, materials and subject matter, which are quite visible in their paintings.

It is important to note that the essence of this paper is to analyze the paintings of Sati Panshak Yilwat, who is a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His paintings to be analyzed are five in number, which include *Before Mosque*, *Collaboration*, *Northern Architecture*, *A Face and Faces*, and *Melody for the Queen*.

Sati Panshak Yilwat and his paintings

Panshak was born in Maimalari Barracks, Maiduguri, Borno State, although his parents are natives of Wulmi Village of Pankshin District in Pankshin Local Government of Plateau State, Nigeria. He had his early education at Holy Cross Primary School Pankshin before proceeding to Trinity Missionary College Pankshin, and later to Government College Amper, where he finally completed his secondary education. It should be noted that, Panshak's interest in studying Fine Arts as a course was developed during his secondary school days. As a result of this, he began his 'A' levels in Fine and Applied Arts at Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State. When he was in Federal College of Education Pankshin, he received training in all units of Fine and Applied Arts and Education, and before his graduation, Panshak had specialised in Painting. He also attended Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where he obtained his Bachelor of Art Degree in Fine Arts, and he equally specialized in Painting.

During his studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, he participated in various art programmes. He was the curator of the Association of Fine Arts Students (AFAS), Zaria Branch, from 2015 to 2016. Panshak has attended and participated in several workshops, seminars, and art exhibitions such as Scapes and Forms Art Workshop, Beyond Aesthetics Workshop, ALGO Festival, New Trends in Arts Seminars, Life in my City Exhibition, among others.

Panshak is a prolific artist, who can produce many paintings within a shortest possible time. He is proficient in the use of painting materials such as brush, knife, easel, palette, among others, and he can also improvise if there is scarcity of materials. As a multimedia artist, he explores the use of sand in some of his paintings, and other materials, including oil and acrylic on canvas. His human compositions are robust and characterised with clarity of details. He executes landscape compositions and abstractions more than portraits. His portrait paintings are few in number, and this can be attributed to what the artist described as his inability to be proficient in portraiture. This is obvious in the facial treatment of some of his human figures.



Plate I, Before Mosque, Oil on Canvas, 120cmx100cm, 2016

In Plate 1, one can see a massive number of Muslim faithful, who are hurriedly and weightlessly rushing to the mosque in order to observe prayer. This scene looks like a Friday afternoon in Ahmadu Bello University, Central Mosque. The work is detailed as it shows the back-views of Muslim worshippers, some of them holding prayer mats, which is an indication that they are going to mosque.

Panshak cleverly selected his colours, which contain well blended mixture of both warm (red and yellow) and cool (blue) colours. He also took into consideration the law of perspective, which makes this scene to look like photographic realism. His use of strokes is well coordinated with a great sense of draughtsmanship, which make his paintings to lucidly narrate different stories.



Plate II. Collaboration, Oil on Canvas, 100cmx100cm, 2015

Panshak is a painter that is adept to landscape paintings, and he carefully chooses his themes, which make them sound proverbial and philosophical. From Plate II, a group of three young men are depicted pushing a load that is not more than what a single person can push; they are doing it just to make it faster. The message that Panshak is passing across to the viewers is that, there is power in collaboration. The work that will waste a single person's time and energy before it is done can be effectively done by three persons without taking them much time. The lesson learnt from the work is that friendship is good because if a group of friends are in good term, they can easily help one another at the time of need.

The artist technically dodged the depiction of faces, and he rendered the people from the back; although there are certain number of people whose faces are depicted but the law of perspective has reduced their level of realism. The artist only used brush strokes to render the figures and their faces. The people in the

scene are sparsely depicted in a market-like place and a vehicle is stationed on the left side of the canvas. Two women are depicted very close to the awaiting vehicle in a manner that suggests their possible ownership of the load being pushed. The scene depicted looks like a market but it is sparsely populated, which makes it to look like early morning market that people are just arriving.



Plate III. Northern Architecture, Acrylic on Canvas, 100 cm x 90 cm, 2016

In Plate III, one can see that the artist rendered a scene that relates the artist with his environment. It is a landscape composition that contains buildings, which are archetype of northern architectures. The sky is rendered in a varied tonal gradation of blue, which makes the scene to look like desert. The trees depicted have no leaves, and their trunks resemble trees from the desert. The weather looks so clear, and the trees without leaves make the scene look like dry season because there is no sign of rain on the sky. The architectures depicted are typical of Northern Nigerian architectures. The scene looks so deserted as if the dwellers of this community have been displaced by the deadly Boko Haram.



Plate IV. A Face and Faces, Acrylic on Canvas, 100cmx100cm, 2016

In Plate IV titled *A Face and Faces*, there is a face, which is conspicuously glaring and there are other faces that appear under it, which may inform the title given to the work. Panshak used geometric shapes to create this work, which makes it to look like African masks. He reduced all the objects to curves and circles. The prominent disk-like head, looks like an *Akuaba* figure from Ghana, it has African-like coiffure on its head, which situates the themes or setting of the work within the continent of Africa. The work

succeeds in portraying the artist as a multitalented individual who renders his painting subjects in diverse ways and with a diverse palette. Here he uses multi-colours in executing the work, which include black, blue, red, yellow and orange, with the dominant colour, being black, over-shadowing the other colours. Some of the colours used, look raw, while others appear to have been toned to achieve the depth of contrast where necessary.

In another work he executed in 2016, and titled *Melody for the Queen* (Plate V), Panshak also used geometric shapes in producing this work. The painting, which was executed in acrylic on canvas, depicts one enlarged head that wears corals round its neck. The head, which represents the *queen*, looks so ethereal, and it is rendered in blue at different tonal gradation, which gives the image an elegant appearance. It is a stylised head of the queen, which is oval shaped with an elongated nose, one round eye and the other eye in a semi-circular pattern. The way in which this work was rendered, makes it far from naturalism. It also looks like an African mask. Panshak (the artist) said that he depicted the queen of Pankshin in an elegant manner, which makes it look as if the queen is in festive mood.

He combined warm (red) and cool (blue) colours together in executing this work. The warm colour, which he used, brings life and light to the work, while the cool colour gives it elegant appearance.



Plate V. *Melody for the Queen*, Acrylic on Canvas, 100cmx120cm, 2016

The artist used well blended colours that make the image look elegant. He employs the use of strokes, which interrelate to form patterns, texture and the overall image.

Conclusion

Sati Panshak Yilwat begun to make his own contributions to the development of contemporary art in Nigeria and Africa at large. He is carving a niche for himself as a landscape and an abstract painter, and this does not mean that the artist has not produced works in other styles, but they are not many. He enjoys the use of opulent and harmonious colours. His styles are varied and diverse, which make his works to be interesting and appealing.

Panshak can be described as a chronicler because of the way he uses his paintings to visually record the daily life of common men. His works also teach lessons to everybody as it can be seen from *Collaboration* (Plate II) that teaches friendship and unity. He chooses his themes as a result of his daily experiences, and his picture illustrations are chosen from his background as a northerner. His painting of scenes is detailed and an archetype of northern scenes. However, his styles are in both naturalism and abstraction. His abstractions are carefully rendered with details and intricate lines, which seem to be to be telling different stories.

Above all, Panshak is an upcoming artist that is full of ideas, and he needs to be encouraged by government agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, and art enthusiasts by sponsoring his art exhibitions and also, by buying his artworks. This will encourage those who are artistically endowed to practice and perhaps to pursue a career in the visual arts.

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