

## LASISI LAMIDI'S STYLISTIC METAL SCULPTURE

**SANI, MUHAMMAD BABANGIDA**

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,  
School of Vocational Education,  
Niger State College of Education, Minna.  
mbabangida44@gmail.com

**MUHAMMAD, ALIYU (Ph.D)**

Department of Fine Arts,  
Faculty of Environmental Design,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.  
alimungus@yahoo.com

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### Abstract

The paper brings to public awareness one of the visual artists (sculptor and painter), who have not received much critical writing, Lasisi Lamidi. Amongst other things, the paper deals with his stylistic approach in the metal sculpture works of the artist under review. The paper also traced the history of the artist, his educational background and also purposively selected, analysed and discussed four of his metal sculptures *The Drunkard*, *Couple*, *From the Market*, and *The Igbo Chief* for possible understanding and appreciation of his stylistic approach to metal sculptures.

**Key words: Style, Lasisi, Metal, Sculpture, Zaria Art School**

### Introduction

The Zaria art school has become a household name as far as Nigerian visual arts are concerned. The school has produced and is still producing calibers of young vibrant artists in different fields of specialisation since its inception in 1955. The pioneer students came up with the idea of “natural synthesis” as an artistic concept. This concept which was advanced by the Zaria Art Society was to correct the European formalistic approach to art practice with some aspects of indigenous cultures in a fusion which, they believed, would create a natural art that they could relate with. Furthermore, the idea of articulating traditional styles as a concept which was variously practiced consciously by the majority of the students, created a platform for the emergence of varied styles in modern Nigerian art. Artists who have played their role in the development of various styles in modern art period include William Aremu Olaosebikan, Yusuf Adebayo Grillo, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onabrakpeya, Solomon Wangbojie, Uche Okeke and Jimoh Bola Akolo, to mention but a few.

These artists had staged series of seminars, workshops, and sales of their works. They focused on introducing a new functional approach to the appreciation of modern Nigerian art. On one hand, this functional approach led to the emergence of different groups and publications in Zaria such as the “Zaria Rebels”, “Nogh–Nogh Art Movement”, “Egghead Magazine”, “Art History Newsletter”, “The Eye Journal of Contemporary Art” and “Anthology of Modern Nigeria Art” On the other hand, the school encouraged and gave emphasis on individual style. The style is as diverse as the influence, which artists received during the course of training and learning process. The influence stems from historical, philosophical, and political experience. Others are religious, socio-cultural, and economic factors or the combination of all.

Duniya in Sani (2010) describes style as the procedure or skill required: the procedure, skill, or art used in a specific task. Similarly, Nelson and Shiff (2010) term style as ...distinctive manner which permits the

grouping of works into related categories. In general terms, style can be seen as dynamic and vibrant within a group or individual for a period of time. Buttressing the above statement Eric (2000) emphasis thus, style in most period's changes either gradually or very fast, although, the process varies between groups or individuals. In ancient Egyptian art for instance, style is seen as a gradual process, but in modern art, the process of style is rapidly developing. The author further emphasizes that, style often develops in a series of jumps, with relatively sudden changes followed by periods of gradual development.

The graduates of the Zaria art School, according to Sani (2010), have developed individual styles and techniques, which they are known for. For instance, some of the graduates who carved a niche for themselves in this regard include but not limited to Professor Solomon Irein Wangboje (1930 – 1998) who carved plastic rubber in different shapes and designs to create lino-cut, Gani Odutokun (1946–1995) delved into liquidised pigment to create accident and design. Jerry Buhari (1959 to date) uses liquidised paints to create spillages, Mu'azu Sani Mohammed (1959 to date) believes in using pigment to create drips and splashes on his support, while Jacob Jat Jari (1960 to date) employs cornstalk medium in painting.

From the foregoing, the paper brings to fore one of the visual artist (sculptor) who has not received much critical writing, Lasisi Lamidi. The paper also traced the history of the artist, his educational background, and also discussed four of his metal sculptures for possible understanding and appreciation.

#### **A Brief Historical Background of Lasisi Lamidi**

Lasisi Lamidi, a sculptor cum painter, is one of the emerging and talented Nigerian artists that strongly believe in experimentation. This is evident in his numerous sculptures, paintings and drawings. According to Yusuf (2008) Lasisi Lamidi was born in *Bibiani*, Ghana on 4th September, 1966. He stated his Primary School in 1979, at Local Educational Authority (L.E.A) Tudun Jukun Primary School, Zaria, where he spent three years and left the school in 1982. Lasisi later joined Amina L.E.A Primary School, Samaru Zaria. He acquired Bachelor of Arts Degree (B.A. Hons), Fine Arts, from the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1990, specialising in sculpture. It would interest one to note that, Lasisi emerged as one of the best in his class. He also holds a Master of Fine Arts degree (M.F.A) from the same institution in 1998; His Doctorate Degree was on static motion: researching on the Yoruba stilt dancer (Agere) for inspiration in sculptural possibilities in the same university in the year 2015.

It is interesting to note that the artist has been involved with some other forms of visual expressions which include mosaic and mural paintings in the course of his artistic career. Aina and Lasisi (2000) reports that Lasisi worked with EMG and Company Limited, Artists and Designers, Zaria, as studio assistant, between 1989 and 1990. Again, he worked as an artist in Module-D Associate and Designers, Zaria, from 1991 to 1994. It is possible that all these experiences he acquired contributed greatly to his creativity.

Dr. Lasisi Lamidi is a keen studio artist who has inspired and motivated many artists in his several studio experiments. The works of a highly skilled foundry man called Julio Gonzales, have been of huge influence on him, such that, both of them have turned to modeling in order to truly understand the depth, volume and form associated with three-dimensional figures. He has participated in over forty solo and joint exhibitions both locally and abroad. He has also executed some art projects and commissions spread across the country. Presently, he is a lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he teaches sculpture at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

### **Analysis of Stylistic Approach in His Metal Sculptures**



**Plate I, The Drunkard Mixed Media, 84cm Height, 2004, Artist's Collection.**

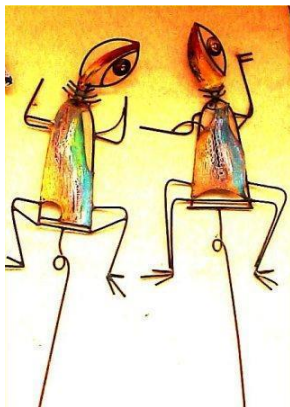
The analysis on this stage is based on the stylistic approach in the metal sculptures of Lasisi Lamidi. The first metal sculpture is titled *The Drunkard*. It is an abstract sculpture depicting a figure holding firm to his green bottle. The work was executed in 2004 with steel, clad with canvas and painted with artist oil colour. The Drunkard represents a male figure whose parts of the body are depicted in different segments and sizes of metal. The head of the figure is rectangular, and in solid metal, on which eyeballs are made out of metal.

The stretched and slumping neck is also made out of a thick rod, over which a spring is worn. In addition, the upper arms are made out of hollow pipes depicting sleeves through which thinner rods are passed to form hands. It is this that, five half inch short rods are welded to represent fingers. The right hand holds the big green bottle of beer while, the left hand is stretched out in a mannerism of the drunk.

The big pipe that forms the trunk is made out of a car exhaust. At both ends on the lower part of the trunk is a construction of a mild steel rod on an inch-long rod over which canvas is sewn and painted red to form the legs and trousers, while the foot is made out of two short pipes. The staggering position of the figure has made the artist to succeed in portraying one of the fatal problems caused by alcohol. The approach of style adopted in this work is similar to the work of Airen T's titled, *Couple* in terms of elongation of the figure, but that of Airen has the rigidity of an Egyptian art, while Lasisi's *Drunkard* has achieved

flexibility and movement. A close observation of the work shows that direct welding technique was used. Enamel paints were used to beautify the surface treatment, with various parts of work. The style explained above is a common style applied in most of the artist's welding works that shows consistency in most of the metal works.

The work *The Drunkard* reveals that the artist has achieved the intended message by placing the figure already slumping to one side with the weight of his huge green bottle, which clearly shows how the weight of an alcohol brings down anybody that indulges in it. Similarly, the figure is wiggled into an interesting shape creating a rather powerful movement. The thrust of the arms shows a movement to depict the "strength in alcohol" which momentarily fails. The complimentary colours green and red create a balance of colour contrast just as the brown tones on the figure harmoniously create another balance on the main figure. Rhythm is achieved through the body movement which actually depicts the gesticulation of most drunkards. The composition is simplified so that viewers can easily understand the concept without any need for explanation.



**Plate II, Couple, 2006, Steel and Oil on Canvas, Artist's Collection**

Plate II is titled *Couple* and, symbolically represents two lizards beside each other in such a manner that appears the two are conversing. The one on the left part of the picture frame seems to be chatting and the other appears to be listening, which evokes the feelings of companionship, mutuality and agreement. The interesting thing about this piece of sculpture is the freedom with which the artist organized the elements and principles of design in a theatrical manner. The use of fluid lines to produce different geometric shapes, to express various parts of the work is attention drawing and captivating.

The heads, eyes, the fore and hind limbs and the tails, are arranged to maintain a balance. The slender trunks are depicting the look of lizards including some of the features on the necks, hind limbs and so on. All of these, bring to the memory of Jean Arp's statement in Onoja *et al* (2016) that art should lose itself in nature, should even be mistaken for nature only one must not try to achieve this by imitating, but by the

very opposite of naturalistic imitation. Without doubt, the artist's style of abstraction is effective in executing his imaginative concepts.

Another paramount factor to behold is the artist's use of colours on the metal sculpture and the use of canvas to cover parts of the heads and the trunks, on which he expresses his design concept on the lizards via oil colours. This style paves way for variety and dislodges colour monotony, which is synonymous to sculpture, in the work. The lizards back portray the rhythmic movement of colours. Again, one could discern, from the appearance of the posture critically, the male and female lizards. The tender look, the seemingly fold-like neck and the small body-mass portray the female lizard.

Looking critically, also, at the two reptiles, one will be reminded of how some wives, use sugar-coated tongues to brain-wash their husbands in order to gain favour and receive attention. Apparently, from oral narrations, this scenario is common with African women. A wife knows how to eulogize or raise her husband's ego using his lineage praises to gladden his heart and make him feel highly esteemed than normal. This, therefore, subsequently prompts the man to give instant approval of his wife's request even if it is hitherto against his wish. With this affectionate posture and composition, the writers have no dissenting opinion about the theme or title given to the work, but to agree with the artist, that indeed, these lizards are a couple.



**Plate III, From the Market, 64cm, 2005 Steel and Oil on Canvas, Artist's Collection**

*From the Market* (Plate III) was executed in 2005 with steel, found objects and oil on canvas (mixed media). It is an abstract sculpture, portraying a female figure coming home from the market. Apparently, one could see how the artist artistically arranges the steel rods together, to give a dynamic posture to the work. Technical proficiency is exhibited here by the artist, especially in the way he positioned the load at the top, with the dramatic movement of the body in a twisting manner, yet maintaining its balance. Contributing to this work, it was said that free standing and three-dimensional sculptures force sculptors to concern themselves with the practicalities of engineering and gravity. It is noted further that, some sculptors cannot create a work with great mass at the top as seen in this work, unless they can find a way to

keep the statue from falling over. Consequently, Lasisi Lamidi, again, has demonstrated a fair of this mechanics style of approach.

The skillful use of colours on the work also shows the artist's mastery and freedom, on the choice of colours. Indeed, Lasisi, being a trained sculptor, can as well be described as a colourist. The skirt and the load on her head are treated in a polychromatic manner with blue and red colours, and also with a touch of white in-between to portray the effects of light and shade. Furthermore, a critical look at the artist's use of lines, create movement by the hands that are loosely spread around the body. The trunk tilted sideways on a broad hip, the load is rested on the head without a support, and with supposed majestic steps, and the figure seems to be walking in an exciting mood. A pair of spring rod is used for its short sleeves, which makes the dress looks like a simple blouse. The sculpture brings one to reminiscence on the Nigerian market scene, where unrestricted joy illuminates the face of a seller who experiences a boom in his and her sale for the day. The movement on the work reveals this joy.



**Plate IV Igbo Chief, Mixed Media, 98cm height, 2005, Artist's Collection**

*Igbo Chief* is an abstract sculpture. The work is an experimental study of the traditional institution of the Igbo. It is made up of iron rods, round pipe, some pieces of canvas material and oil colour. The head of the figure is in rectangular shape with a twisted iron rod painted with light ultramarine blue colour in a curved manner. The eyes are suggested by two round ball shapes. The three iron rods at the top painted in yellow, black and blue probably suggest the usual feathers attached to the red caps of chiefs. The beads round the neck flow down to the chest of the figure, indicating the rich culture of the Igbo. The characteristic nature of the "Igbo Chief" is similar to other works by the artist. Okoli (2008) explains in an exhibition catalogue, *Sketches in Colour* that characteristic nature of sketches is its fearless fluidity and mutability because it is hoped that it remains like underwear for the final piece. Furthermore, the author concludes that the strength of Lasisi's works lies in their free experimental nature which is represented in this piece of work.

## **Conclusion**

From the above discussions, this paper submits that Lasisi Lamidi takes bold step in experimentation with metal sculpture, using lines to produce his works. This has made his creativity and artistic trends, to have a footing in the modern Nigerian art. All the works analysed in this paper are all abstracted metal sculptures. Aina in Adeyemo and Duniya (2016) opined that art is abstraction, derive this abstraction from nature, while dreaming before it and think more of the creation, which will result to nature. The key-spirit of Lasisi's stylistic approach to metal sculptures is the use of lines in its different sizes and thicknesses to create wonderful and artistic forms, mostly in abstract and derived from nature. This is evident in all the works appraised and shown in this paper. They are aesthetic expressions that evoke diverse feelings and created within a variety of materials and ideas.

An interaction with the artist, made the writers to understand that Lasisi tries to harmonise sculpture and painting in the expressions of his metal works, which is an innovation of art practice. Lasisi once states:

I love the word Jacob Jari used in one of his write ups about me; 'eclectic'. This sums up my idea of creating an art work. I could pick ideas from whatever fascinate me even from other artists and add enormous dose of my own idea and recreate. I enjoy painting but was trained a sculptor. My sculptures are a mixture of painted canvas and steel which could sometimes be found objects. I explore the dynamics of lines especially as they affect the female figures.

In the quest for elucidation of the above statement, the artist has achieved that in his full size sculptural works, he came up with this style that can be described as minimalist sculpture. The strength of form, content and enduring nature of the stylistic rendition of the metal sculptures are captured and analysed in this write-up. Lasisi and his philosophical position of putting his best, in all his visual arts; as a trained sculptor has resulted in exposing some sense of maturity, thoughtfulness and dynamism. These are evident in his painterly sculptures and are considered interesting and successful.

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