

## SCULPTURE AS RECORD AND VISUAL TESTIMONY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Despite tremendous efforts by sculptors to televise their artworks by keeping records as testimony for the society to have a second look, it appears that society is not keen about it. In most cases, the aforementioned works showcase the activities of the society, both positive and negative with a view to correct their ways of life. Artists capture actions and experiences and portray them in sculpture. The artworks found around us are in one way or another bearing the society's activities which could be humorous or sorrowful. This paper desires to draw the attention of the society to all the positive and negative activities that have been recorded and televised for the sake of positive change. It has been justified by art critics that, often, sculptures depict the naked truth of what one does in a society. The paper concludes and recommends that society should be mindful of its actions, and culprits be made to reposition their ways so that positive legacy can be recorded as testimony. Sculptures of such activities can be a source of building a befitting testimony that can keep the society out of pathos.

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**Keywords:** Record, Visual Arts, Society, Testimony, Artists

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### Introduction

Tremendous efforts are made by sculptors to produce and display art works that at can serve as records of society's activities (both positive and negative). The philosophical relevance of such works however, appears not to be comprehended by the society. In most cases, the works are viewed as just ordinary objects. The essence of displaying the works is to televise society's daily activities for possible correction or change from the negative ways of life, but these are often misread. There seems to be a complete absence of the mind to think that the works displayed are advertising some of society's positive or negative actions which contribute to the backwardness of the growth of the society economically.

### Aim

The paper aims to establish the possibility of making artworks suitable and effective media for public communication. The paper will draw the attention of Nigerians to the fact that art can be used as a visual record of events both negatively and positively.

### Visual Art as Testimony

The use of visual arts as testimony ranges from simple anecdotes to detailed accounts or personal revelations (one's experience). Jari (2004) affirms that, as he walks through the Sculpture Garden of the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, it is amazing how he takes so much for granted in his stay in the Department for over thirty (30) years. He remarks that, for instance, he has not noticed the different aspects of Nigerian histories being captured for posterity. Jari further states that, many sculptures displayed, mirror Nigeria's pathos. This is to say that, the attitude or the character people bear today will determine tomorrow's fate, and today's history will tell what will be the history of tomorrow. For that, the visual arts record stands as a testimony to remind the society and as a reformatory agent (the work that portrays bad aspects of life can be encouraged to stop as a "bad seed", while the good aspects of behaviour can be encouraged to continue as a "good seed").

The various ceremonial functions and festivals such as the yearly ceremonies held in Abuja, Nigeria which features many cultural displays from all over the country; advertise and showcase artifacts and cultural ideologies of Nigeria. Such displays usually open the country to visitors. They educate them and citizens about the hidden and different philosophies, cultural practices and values deeply embedded in the country. The aforementioned can only be effectively achieved through the use of visual artworks and performances. Therefore, it is imperative that the value and wide reaching effects of art as a medium of communication should not be underestimated. Art works have the power to help encourage and develop cohesiveness among a people.

Visual arts checkmate and balance societal behaviours and propagate the need for a peaceful and healthy living environment. Visual arts have also invariably become an agent of social commentary. They are instruments that record and visualize as a testimony/blue print for nation building. For instance, the Nigerian musician popularly known as Charlie Boy has been quoted saying: "Our Mumu Don Do, (referring to the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari) should come from the London hospital or resign". Such statements made by versatile and pro-active artists, serve as motivation for Nigerians both at home and in the Diaspora; to take initiative through protests that demand for change from the status quo. Artworks rebuke and protest against injustice and highlight as well as note corrective institutions and establishments such as the EFCC, ICPC and the Nigerian Judicial System. Artworks can ridicule and effectively recount past events, they can promote change and be a potent binding agent.

It is the author's opinion that the value of an artwork increases when it is able to affect the livelihood of its audience either by expanding or deepening their state of awareness. An artist's means of expression is to be considered unique and best for him/her as it is the medium that appropriately embodies what the artist feels or is compelled to proclaim to his/her audience at a particular time. Art is capable of enlightenment, heightening and refining society's experiences. Its visual form can also clarify society's feelings and emotions. It can shift one's opinion about issues and can adequately establish a unified mindset amidst people.

Art also bears physically, and intellectually the testimony of certain qualities exhibited in certain actions/activities. Such qualities include sensitivity, flexibility, originality, resourcefulness, inventiveness, curiosity which all manifest not only in art but also in science and other areas of development. Kandinsky in *Chip* (1968) contributes that, the value of an art form can have a pleasant or unpleasant effect. It can appear beautiful, ugly, skillful, unskillful, fine, coarse and so on, yet; it must not to be rejected either for the qualities which are held to be positive or for the qualities which are felt to be negative. Art is one of the many ways of deepening society's knowledge and understanding. Artistic or visual representations of events offer valuable insight to understanding complex subjects or issues.

### **Conceptual Art**

Conceptual Art Movement gives priority to idea over the art product or the object. Lewitt (1967) says in conceptual art, the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that, all of the planning and decisions are made before hand and the execution is perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.

Morton (1983) explains that, as a movement in art, conceptualism has been syncretic, comprising many groups and individuals with different, often conflicting theories and practices. To Morton conceptualists claim that art lies not in the object itself but in the artist's idea of how to form it". Art products can therefore be considered as superfluous. For the conceptualists; content of an artwork is more significant factor in artistic creation than form and aesthetic quality. Conceptual art/artists focus more on the artist's intention, when combining social, political, and economic issues as content. Their works continually attack modern arts' prevailing emphasis on aesthetics. A conceptualist goal has and still remains a conscious effort to eliminate the need for form in art.

Conceptual art theories form a suitable foundation for this paper because of the views of the authors that artworks must and should be viewed beyond their physical forms and should be appreciated more for the message embedded within them. The sculptures discussed in this paper may not at first glance bear aesthetic propensities; but are however, clear in their purpose as visual records of positive and negative vices in their results. These artworks are considered because they seemingly appear to reject sensory pleasure and instead focus on the perceptual re-education of the public. Such works transcend their physical formations and assume diverse roles as critic, teacher and artist. In most developed nations, visual artists and their artworks are more concerned with instilling or serving as agent of positive change. Their artworks are capable of bringing about positive change in their society that at times engulf in upheavals. Such artists are known to use such situations as themes in their works to record

activities which can serve as object of testimony and impetus for positive change within communities.

Art works displayed for both private and public views, in one way or the other bear testimony to a nation's activities. These activities can be humorous or sorrowful with a wide reaching effect on the members of the society. The paper will dwell on artworks that record the negative and positive aspects of Nigeria which serve as a catalyst for positive change on the attitudes so that, the society can be a place of tranquility where unity and harmony is achieved for the improvement of socio-economic, political growth and development. These artworks are records of society's actions, kept alive as a means of touching humanity's emotions and as a possible means of solving future issues and serve as sources for correction.

Jegede in Mbahi (2007) states that, visual arts are part of educational development strategies where artists creatively record issues to solve problems by displaying or captured memories as corrective measures. This means that, if people within a society create problems, it is the duty of the sculptors to use their creative talents to visually record such problems and proffer solutions. These sculptures are to be rendered in such a manner that, they can adequately point out corrective measures thus, curtailing the ugly situation from re-occurring.

Clear in the purpose, as visual arts record positive and negative vices and their results; these works are considered because they seemingly appear to reject sensory pleasure and are instead focused on the perceptual re-education of the public. Such works transcend their physical formations and assume diverse roles as critic, teacher and artist. Such works when viewed from the right perspective merge existing issues alongside theories in art to provide the public with a visual answer. These works are important because of their potential to direct potential spectators to take note of the art, indirectly expanding the public's visual awareness. All these are possible because conceptual art takes on the character of an activity rather than a product.

Conceptual art strongly desires to transcend the structures of art. Therefore, there is often a strong socio-political dimension to the works produced, which clearly reflects a whole dissatisfaction with the status-quo, with the society and government policies. It is important to note here that, though conceptual art is a foreign concept as most art movements are, African/Nigerian artists are not left behind in contributing to the trends and theories of conceptual art. Hence, the focus on sculptures in the sculpture garden of the Department of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. These sculptures as aforementioned bear physical and physiological conceptual ideologies that members of the Nigerian society must be made to be aware of. The works record some recognizable idea, issue or image as testimony. When such works are adequately and correctly digested, they bring change and spur action amongst people or viewers.

A nation can never have the mind or the spirit of economic development when negative activities are the order of the day. According to David and Paul in Damden (2008), while paraphrasing former United Nations (UN) secretary general, Koffi Anan says that, weapons of personal destructions impair Africa's economic development and social progress thereby impeding efforts developed. This means that, instead of people to use their hands to produce things that are beneficial and bring about effective sustainable development generally, Nigeria is faced with issues such as Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and kidnappers who spend time and energy in creating situations that bring or cause catastrophes such as fear, killings, destruction of properties which all contribute to poor development and progress of the nation.

#### **Ahmadu Bello University Sculpture Garden as Visual Testimony**

The sculpture garden of the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria has been in existence for a long time. In fact, it is considered just a few years younger than the Department itself. Ogboto in Jari (2007) states that the Garden was established in 1969 by Professor Saliu Suleiman, when he was the Head of Sculpture section. It is stated by Jari (2007) that his (Professor Suleiman) objective for establishing it was to provide a space for the reservation and preservation of outdoor sculptures of students which hitherto were destroyed for lack of space. Jari comments that it might have started small but it is presently occupying a space about 80 square meters in front of the departmental building (p. 81).

The Garden is populated with assorted sculptures varying both in subject matter, theme and media of expression. The garden also houses a Suya Spot and a Kiosk/shop that sells an assortment of drinks and other essentials. The garden serves many purposes like tourist's attraction to visitors, whiling away time or as an interesting area for students' in-between lectures and as a venue for drawing classes.

The sculptures within the garden address several themes which relate to the events that have or are taking place in Nigeria. These sculptures serve as testimony of the events by immortalizing them in several dimensions. The purpose of such sculptures is to remind members of the society of emotional feelings which transpired during such interactions. Sculptures which have testimonial tendencies (both positive and negative) include the following:



**Figure 1, "Peace", Ibiloye O. Emmanuel, Concrete, 78cm H, 2001**

Figure 1 is a direct cement sculpture composition of a dove (peace bird) is a record of a positive testimony. The whole body of the bird is resting on the tail of its feather in a symmetric balance and the work is properly re-enforced and balanced that can stand the taste of time. The dove bird is recorded in such a manner that it looks calm and harmless. Due to its peaceful nature some churches, schools, groups, companies use it as logo; and individual artists, use it as symbol of peace. Some organizations use it to symbolize peaceful zone. Perhaps, the sculptor thought likewise by rendering the peace dove in sculpture and fixed it just as one enters the gate of the sculpture garden as testimony. It is the dove sculpture one will first encounter when entering the garden. This is to say there is peace or one is at peace as one enters the sculpture garden. It becomes the object of peace testimony and impetus to the society.

The artist was able to record the testimony of this kind of bird in the garden as peace animal for humanity. This implies that, viewers should be aware that, some inanimate like animals can be an object of positive testimony to the society; owing to the fact that, Nigeria needs peace particularly at this time of Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, Gunmen and so on. The work is a recorded testimony to Nigerians to embrace peace and not conflict or violence among themselves. It serves as agent of peace which is capable of bringing about positive change in communities, families and individuals engulfed in upheavals. The testimony recorded by this piece of dove sculpture is cautioning Nigerians to learn to live in peace and unity by tolerating each other's religion for positive development. The work embodies what the artist feels and is compelled to proclaim to audience.



**Fig. 2, "Peril of a Nation", Tafida S. W., Mixed-Media, 135x95cm, 2006**

In figure 2, the artist records one of the events that took place between 2005 and 2006 when a lot of incidences of plane crash took place which led to the loss of many lives. It first started with 153 Loyola Jesuit's College students whose plane crashed landed on the way from Abuja to Lagos, Nigerian Army soldiers who went for peace keeping in Darfur; and on their way from Kano to Abuja; and the top Nigerian Army Officers in number. All the soldiers and the students died and left their families (wives husbandless and children fatherless) and parents. These intervals of situations indeed shocked Nigerians that time. The situation prompted the sculptor to portray a female sculpture in mixed-media (direct cement and metal) to record the event and serve as testimony. The artist depicted the woman carrying the crashed plane particles that killed her husband. She bends and lifts the plane and raises her face up as if she is presenting it to somebody above, perhaps to God himself. Her mouth is slightly open with her eyes closed as if she is praying or asking God why? The report sounds unbelievable that her husband is dead so she went and lifted the plane up. Some parts of the plane are disjointed, broken and perforated. Her right leg is pushed to the front, while the left one is pushed backward possibly to make her balance well. The artist produces the work half nude; that is, from the part of the chest to the breasts is partly left open down to the waste with her right lap left open possibly to suggest her unpreparedness when she heard of the shocking news of the death of her husband in the plane crash. The sculpture serves as visual testimony to the event by immortalizing it in this dimension as a mirror to Nigeria's pathos. It bears testimony to the nation's activities

The whole composition suggests tragedy which is a record or testimony in sculpture. This was the synergy that happened; putting the families in a devastating situation particularly the wives. What perhaps must have come into their minds was how to survive with the children that are left under their care and many other issues. A combination of all these emotional expressions provides testimony that are negative for the society to correct and guard from future occurrences.



**Figure 3, "Drunkard", Gyanko M. Zinyan, Concrete, 137cm H, 1991**

Figure 3 is a male sculpture composition which records the antisocial behaviour of a man in the society. It is titled *Drunkard* as testimony of posterity to view reckless kind of life. To record the behaviour, the sculptor puts in place so many attributes such as actions to create a composition that is loaded with negative stories.

In recording this situation, the sculptor creates the composition in such a way that, the head tilts to the front. The stomach protrudes; the waste and the upper parts of the knee slightly protrude to the front. Part of the left hand hangs downward and at the same time holding a bottle of alcohol which leans on his body. The long sleeve clothe shows the buttons are carelessly not put on; creating a sign of rough dressing which is usually seen by the people who are drunkards. From the shoulder to the knee, it bends back and front; while the remaining legs bend backward and front again in a staggering mood to the base. The mouth is holding the remaining part of the cigarette as he puffs. He is wearing tattered shoes which suggest poverty. The right hand is hanging straight to the ground and completely backward to show the effect of the alcohol. The whole body is portrayed in a rough form to depict the coarse nature of the drunkards that are addicted.

In the work, the sculptor is able to utilize his creative ability to skillfully record the activities of a drunkard behaviour which they are usually known. The gesture and mood of the drunkard are also recorded. The toxic nature of the alcohol is seen as the drunkard is portrayed to be unable to balance. He is unable to stand, and looks haggard. The sculpture work records the behaviour of how some men bring shame to their families and close associates as a result of excessive drunkenness. They cannot control themselves in public and even before those they are supposed to be respected. Due to the intoxication, they talk anyhow, walk anyhow and do things anyhow. The artist records this kind of social behaviour as testimony (picture) for the society to see the effect of it for, the society to disassociate itself from such which brings disrespect, disgrace, disregard, and will not be valued by the family members or the community. This is a caution to viewers to stay clear. According to Damden and Gadzama (2006), the sculpture shows that the man who is always drunk will not be able to walk or stand in an appropriate position without staggering. The man cannot help himself because of the toxic condition he has placed himself in. Perhaps the artist records this testimony as vital message to youths and adults who indulge in excessive drinking. Alcoholism is a social problem which apart from disgrace, affects the family institution in several ways and Nigerian social structure in general.





**Fig. 4, "Suicide", Anthony Ekpe, Mixed-media, 135cm H, 2006**

Figure four records the effect of a person who is a chain smoker. The finished work is a semi abstract/conceptual rendition of how cigarettes can affect the human body. It is hung to the branch of a tree so that viewers can appreciate the forms that are looking abnormal especially the hands, and the absence of the head. Mixed-media is employed in achieving the composition. The head is creatively eaten with fire turning which implies the cigarette burning part. The work records what smokers look like when they are addicted to it. Most times, they look black, skinny, coarse, unhealthy and helpless which shortens their live span. In the work, the cigarette stick that forms the neck and the head which has been eaten is a metaphorical message to those who allow themselves to be consumed by this deadly circumstance.



**Figure 5, "Economic Meltdown", John Baba Jacob, Found Object, 152cm H, 2008**

In Africa, in the past the general belief is that, men go to the bush to hunt wild animals to sell and bring money to be used at home or the meat is brought to the family as food. There were some men that hunting is their work basically and with it they take proper care of their families. However, on viewing figure five, a female figure is produced in found object. The artist records and televises the victim (widow) where a woman has taken up the challenge by being in the position of her husband in this context.

The woman is captured with the whole weight resting on the left leg with protruding heap. The right leg is raised up wide opened and curving backward. Around her waist, is a bead; moving upward is the two breasts standing erect which suggest youngness and activeness. The left hand is holding a bow straight setting with the right eye. The left hand is also holding the string with the arrow as if ready to shut an animal. The cap is set in such a way as if it is shading her from the radiation of the heat of the sun; implying that she is not finding the challenges easy. The artist records the situation women are passing through at present. It is a detestable testimony.

The sculptor tries to record the challenges of women during the collapsing period of the economic meltdown around 2005 to 2006. At that time, life was not easy for men to cater for the needs of the family alone. This work suggests that, women who want to support their husbands have to leave on board by coming in. This metaphorically depicts a woman of such repute that is

out to hunt which implies that she is up and doing to support her husband as way of reducing the burden of the family loaded on him alone. It is often said that 'two hands are better than one'.

On the other hand, one will be tempted to say that, it is unusual or is a taboo in African context for a woman to carry bow and arrow to shoot. Perhaps even at present, Nigerian women are not finding things easy following the current economic recession and signifies that women cannot lock themselves indoors. They too should come out from their houses and take part in supporting their husbands. The testimony from this sculpture shows that, gone were the days when women were kept indoors. Time has come for women to come out of their shell of being full housewives and struggle to contribute to the up-keep of the homes. Due to the economic meltdown in 2006 and economic recession in 2015, the man alone cannot cater for the family.

In most homes today, there is no difference between the man and the woman in the growth and sustenance of the home. The work is a metaphor of a woman that is all out to hunt or to look within possible means to support her husband because the burden is huge for him to shoulder alone. This is perhaps why women are today hustling here and there to support their husbands. Women are seen playing politics, going to formal school, going extra miles in holding various positions in both government and private sectors, come out early in the morning to go and sweep the streets, offices, restaurants, businesses (buying and selling) in the market in order not to be a burden to their husbands and to also help them (husband) in the up keeping of the family.

Women who lost their husbands as a result of one form of crisis or the other as a result of the economic meltdown or economic recession and are left with the children's daily challenges cannot just stay at home and expects miracle to come from heaven. The artist metaphorically portrays a female sculpture which is struggling as a casualty of the economic meltdown, economic recession, Sharia crises and Boko Haram is left with huge responsibilities of the children as testimony.

There were and are still women of substance who are holding leadership positions in United States of America (USA) like Condoleezza Rice, Margret Thatcher (late) of the United Kingdom, and Hillary Clinton – former Secretary General and in the last election, contested for president of USA. In Africa, Helen Johnson became the president of Liberia, Patricia Atteh was one-time Nigerian Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dora Akunyili (late), former National Food, Drug Agency Commission (NAFDAC) boss and former Minister For Information and Communication, Diezani Alison Madueke, was former Minister for Petroleum, Pauline Tallen, former Deputy Governor of Plateau State and now Special Adviser to Aisha (president Buhari's wife), Sarah Jibrin, contested to be the president of Nigeria twice under the People's Democratic Party (PDP) but did not win and former Special Adviser to former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Obiageli Ezekwesili, became former Minister for Education, Ruqquayyatu Rufai, was former Minister for Education, Ngozi Okonja-Iweala, was former Minister for Finance, and the first African woman to contest for the position of the World Bank president in 2012 but because of racism she could not get it, Sarah Reng Ochekepe, former Minister for Water Resources, Farida Waziri, former boss for Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Benni Lar, two terms House of Representative Member, and some are still in the House of Representatives and in the Senate; all in the effort to support their families.

Sculpture, is a flexible means of communication and expression. Its visual products, are explorative and creative and serve as record of memories and testimonies. Sculptors must use every opportunity to visualize and document relevant issues in society. Visual and print media should cover socio-political and cultural events. These can be effectively documented in journals, workshops, conferences, seminars etc. with a view to create and change in the minds of members of the society about the negative impacts of issues and extremists' groups such as Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, drug addiction, HIV/AIDs, Drug abuse and many more can have on the general outlook of the society as well as it's negative impacts on economic growth and development of Nigeria's economy.

It is important for artists to know and understand the powerful effect of artworks on the people. Visual artworks (sculpture) can change one's mindset, teach lessons and reposition former



negative actions to positive ends. If it contains positive ideologies, it can spur, encourage, build, bring about peace, unity and improve the economic development of individuals or the society through its positive testimony. Art should not only be concerned with aesthetics, but injected with positive ideology and philosophy that can possibly lead viewers to positive action.

It is also important to note that, visual arts are a record of both negative events and positive historical events that are significant to the development of a nation. It is a means of recording history, learning about one's culture through the study and appreciation of antiquities- their functions, significance as well as methods of production and ways to improve on them. Visual artworks act as intellectual stimulants and means of expressing or communicating one's emotions. It is imperative for creative works of art to be viewed for their multi-faceted capabilities in affecting change within a society. Artists must understand that; their visual forms can help in expressing their membership in the society they live in.

Art works serve as records which bear the testimony of Nigerians' activities (positive or negative), and serve as reminders for African political leaders and their dirty politics which is characterized by all forms of atrocities. It can serve as medicine for healing wounds and all forms calamities. These atrocities have in recent times become the focus of photo journalists whose primary concern is to capture the results and to televise them to create awareness about such ills.

### Conclusion

The paper has highlighted that visual arts records or bear the testimonies of a society's history. As members of society, artists to always check the positive or negative aspects of lives and give objective commentaries for national development. The paper also tries to significantly and justifiably use sculpture as testimony in the society with specific mention of certain sculptures in the Department of Fine Arts, Sculpture Garden, ABU, Zaria. Finally, it discusses the value and position of visual arts in the society. From the above discourse, Nigerians (especially the leaders) should have a second look at the artworks and change their attitude of fighting corruption, insecurity to enhance the growth and development of the economy through reducing unemployment, youth restiveness (abstinence and impatient) and the ugly face of economic recession.

### Recommendations

This paper recommends that, there should be an enlightenment or awareness programme such as workshops, conferences, and mass media for the society to the visual artworks as record of aspects of Nigerians' history. Such works bear testimony and are deliberately televised culprits. This is healthy for economic, social, political and peaceful environments. Government, NGO and individuals should support visual artists through workshops, conferences, symposiums and others.

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