

VERTICAL LINES AS CREATIVE RESOURCE IN CITYSCAPE PAINTING

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Abstract

Cityscapes have been and still are a source of inspiration for artists. It has been rendered in realistic, stylized and abstract forms. However from the literature reviewed attention has not been directed strictly to the implied vertical linear features in the cityscape. In exploring the aesthetic visual elements of the cityscape the paper was guided by the objectives which were to capture the visual elements of the cityscape in vertical lines possibly to explore the diverse dynamic qualities in painting. To achieve this, the participant observation method (POM) and studio experimental method were used through which on the spot drawings and digital photographs were taken of Zaria metropolis. In analyzing the data, paintings were executed in three categories of the realistic, semi abstract and total abstraction. It was discovered that a reduction of realistic cityscapes into vertical lines brings out their intrinsic aesthetic quality.

Keywords: Vertical Lines, Cityscape, Aesthetic, Creative, Painting

Introduction

Visual elements in art are colour, line, shape, form, space and texture. All of these elements have special meanings and functions. Line, Mittler and Regan (1992) asserts is perhaps the most crucial of the visual elements. It is definite, assertive and intelligible, it is precise and unambiguous, and it commits the artist to a specific statement. Line conveys meaning through its identification with fundamental natural phenomena. Line leads the viewer's eye and involves him in its destiny. This then serves as the main thrust for this paper.

Uzoagba (2000) states that line does not really have physical existence and that it is an idea which is initially mathematical, corresponding to the direction of movement, the distance between two points or the boundary of an area. There are lines that really do not exist as lines, they are referred to as implied lines. The edges of buildings, of objects and of a variety of three – dimensional forms for example can be said to be implied lines. It is from this direction, that the artists build a body of works which forms a vista that analyses and symbolic interpretation can be deduced.

Line according to Uzoagba is generally of two kinds. These are structural and rhythmic lines, with each possessing certain qualities that are unique to them. Structural lines are vertical, horizontal, diagonal, broken, zigzags, dotted, angular and straight lines. Rhythmic lines include curve, spiral, wavy, scroll, loop and dotted lines. This paper is, concerned with the vertical type of line from the structural family. The selected cityscape areas of this study found in Zaria, are composed of structural and rhythmic lines. The study delimited itself to representing areas that possess vertical linear features deduced from the implied lines which are found on the edges of buildings, windows, doors, pillars, vehicles, pedestrians, poles,

cables, and all other forms of three dimensional objects. All of the aforementioned, possess different characters of line ranging from thick to thin vertical lines. Vertical line compositions communicate a feeling of loftiness. While erect lines seem to extend upwards beyond human reach, towards the sky. Extended perpendicular lines suggest an overpowering grandeur, beyond ordinary human measure.

Background to the Study

The impressionists and naturalists painted canvases showing bridges and streets, the scenes running through Paris and places in provincial centers – often adding figures to the fields and city to convey a sense of energy. Re-occurring items in such scenes were houses, cars, trees, hawkers, electric/telephones poles and human activities. The city offers an artist so many inviting subjects, and vibrant colours. Cityscapes are made up of two visual elements, but there is a third element and this the most characteristic one, atmosphere, which consists of light, shadow, sky, perspective and a palette that varies with the time of day.

Albenda (1970) states that at every instance, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting, a view, waiting to be explored. The city is a living organism full of movement and contrast. Cityscape painting has undergone diverse experimentation in representation. Today artists try as much as possible to re-conceptualise the city by probing its perpetual significance and its physical impact. The socio political idea and environmental issues have become the reasons that influence not only how the city is represented, but also, how it is interacted with.

Zaria is a major city in Kaduna state, Nigeria. Its landscape and cityscape has fascinating scenes that have captured the attention of artist's residing in and around it overtime. Artists like Dele Jegede, Gani Odutokun, and Jerry Buhari among others have painted beautiful scenes from it. However, some few artists like Gushem (1990) and Nwankwo (2003) respectively took an academic step in the landscape and its elements within Zaria. It has however been discovered that attention given to the Zaria city did not focus on the linear features of Zaria cityscape.

Statement of the Problem

Artists have found different styles and techniques for painting cityscapes. Some are in realistic, stylized, abstract, conceptual renditions; however, it appears no critical observation has been made by these artists to look at the cityscape purely from an implied vertical linear perspective. The problem of this research is therefore, whether the aesthetic qualities of Zaria cityscape can be explored in implied vertical lines in painting.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. appropriate vertical lines into cityscape painting compositions

2. appropriate the potentials of the inherent linear features associated with the cityscape, for exploration in contemporary painting.
3. exploit the dynamic qualities of different vertical lines for painting.

Review of Related Literature

This section of the study concentrates on the search for relevant and pertinent materials which have considerable relationship with this study either in terms of subject matter, media, surface, pigments or elements of design used. It also concerns itself with the philosophy behind each reviewed work. The relationship of line as both an element of art and tool for visual representation and expression was discussed.

Three works were discussed and analysed based on artistic periods/movements, style of expressions and media. These works are created by Claude Monet (1840-1926), Jerry Buhari and Philip Gushem.

Conceptual Framework

In the representation of Zaria cityscape focus was on the street scenes, different characters and types of vertical lines where used which resulted in pure abstract paintings of the cityscape. The approach employed by the artist, is related to the emotive form of abstract painting pioneered by Kandinsky (1866-1944) involving the more or less spontaneous exteriorisation of feelings in non-representational marks on canvas. Since 1945 Lourda (1987) states that there has been a considerable revival and extension of this process whenever modern painting is practiced. In many ways modernist art can be seen as a continuous series of reduction. It was through carefully considered reductions as well as metaphysical studies that Piet Mondrian reached the perfection of his work. Selz (1981) states that, for Mondrian, form stands by itself. The painter eliminates tragedy and all traces of emotion from his canvas in order to create an art of pure relationship of colour, line and plane asymmetrical balance. In his rejection of the traditional qualities of painting representation, texture and the appearance of three dimensionality, Mondrian was attempting to create a 'pure reality' based on a harmonious, expressionless sense of order. His compositional structure developed with complete consistency, varying only with the introduction of lozenge shaped paintings and the abandonment of colour.

In Piet Mondrian's (1872-1944) *Analysis of a Pier in the Ocean*, he reduced visual reality to vertical and horizontal lines of different lengths. His paintings became more severely geometric, building on a repertoire of black lines on a white background bounding rectangles of primary colour.

Mondrian (1872-1944), like Kandinsky (1866-1944), Selz avers was involved in the world of the spirits, in theosophy and eastern symbolism. The crosses are not only a simplification of the cubist grid, they have also been seen as Christian symbols and universal signs. The vitalistic aspects of masculine had

expressional findings in vertical lines, while the feminine and tranquil principle is expressed in the horizontal direction.

The study had examined the cityscape like Mondrian by carefully and strictly reducing the embodiment of it to nuances of colour lines. In this study however, since it had set out to visually investigate/interpret the implied lines resources of the cityscape, the hues used in exploration were not limited basically to primary colours and instead of the representations in different calculated rectangular shapes boxes embodied with dark grids, the study in its case had vertical lines in varied varieties giving the work a vibrancy appeal.

Review of related works



Figure I, Artist Claude Monet (1840 – 1926), Title “La Rue Montorgueil Decked with Flags” Date: 1878, Medium Oil on Canvas, Size 24 ¼ x 13, Source: The life and Works of Monet. Great Britain. Paragon. Book Service Limited

Figure I is a painting by Claude Monet showing a cityscape with an atmosphere of intense and dynamic activity that appears rowdy. It is a parallel view of a city street in some kind of victorious celebration judging by the number of flags on display. The painting is punctuated by emphatic brush strokes which represent the staff holding the flags in the foreground down to the far distance which opens the distance to the end of the street. The effect is archived by the rapid application of red, blue, white and grey hues. Figures occupying the lower part of the composition appear to have been depicted through singular vertical movements of the brush in dark tones of neutral colours. This work is related to this research because it also deals with a cityscape painting, having tall buildings with pedestrians walking down the street with some flags and other elements in vertical position.



Figure VI, Artist Jerry Buhari, Title “The Trance”, Medium Enamel on Canvas, Size 33 x 102 cm, Year 1992, Source: Sardauna. A Quarterly Magazine Published in Zaria

In the painting, two forms looking like human figures are seen even though in an abstracted form in a manner suggestive of gossiping and chatting about something important. They are represented in a dark hue probably of purple, which in turn is being overlapped by the vertical linear movement of the yellow ochre creating a sunset scene and setting of evening time. The fluid flow of the yellow ochre fuses into the composition and blends with it as it flows downwards to the foreground. This is where this work relates to this research, the fluid flow of the yellow ochre into the composition flows vertically. The light colour of the background shows through patches of areas the colours didn't get to due to the liquidized technique of applying the pigment. It is a technique which colours are liquidized and poured on the canvas and allowed to flow in any direction in this case, vertically.



Figure VII, Artist Philip Obed Gushem, Title “African Form and Motifs”, Medium Oil on Canvas, Size 90 x 60 cm, Year 1995. Source: From Artists Collection

Figure VII shows a composition of stylised figures dressed in a variety of traditional attires which appear to be in a procession, judging by the cluster. Each figure has been simplified and imbued with a variety of hues giving the picture a celebrative atmosphere. Their attires are painted with traditional motifs which flow in a linear manner into the background. The relationship of this work to this research can be seen in the vertical linear rendition of the figures. There also appears to be a conscious attempt by the artist not to muddle colours as each hue is applied neatly without disturbing the other, yet achieving unity through complimentary and contrasting actions. The dominant colours of the painting are blue and yellow ochre.

Methodology

The study adopted the participant observation method (P.O.M) and studio experimental method for the execution of the works. The data used is made up of several photographs taken by the author/artist.

In collecting the data, study sketches and digital photographs were used. Study sketches were made in the early stage to familiarize the artist with the forms, shapes and features of the cityscape. Photographs were also taken so as to study further the vertical line features of Zaria cityscape. The photographs served as a reference and a guide to the completion of the study.

Discussion of the Paintings Produced

It contains paintings deductively executed from the digital photographs and drawings taken or made during the process of data collection. In analyzing the data, the paintings were developed in three stages namely; the realistic, semi-abstract and total abstraction. They are presented as plates, followed by the analysis of the works.

Representational / Realism

This was the exploratory stage in which the researcher painted Zaria cityscape in its apparent form. This was done to acquaint the artist with the elements in the cityscape and to appreciate its aesthetics. Different times of the day which are of different colour schemes were represented. The morning colours are subtle, afternoons are warm, bright and distinct while evening colours are dark and subdued. These were further explored in the developmental stage.



Plate I, Title “Hanyan Kasuwa I”, Medium, Oil on canvas, Size: 80 x 100cm, Year 2008.
Hanyan Kasuwa I” 2008, Plate I

This painting titled *Hanyan Kasuwa I* is a realistic impression of Yaro Street in Samaru Zaria. This painting is done with the use of yellow ochre, which is the dominant colour. It is reflected on all the elements in the composition.

The vertical linear features inherent by reason of the nature of the structure in this composition are visible on the edges of the buildings, the windows and the doors especially of the buildings in the background.

Some of the cable and poles are standing vertically especially those in the background. Others are on the pillar beneath the sheds and on the edges of the vehicles on the road.

Semi Abstraction

In this stage, which is the second, the cityscape is slightly distorted into semi-abstract composition. This involves elongation and defragmentation of the contour lines of all forms in the cityscape. Conscious attempt and steps were taken to emphasise the implied linear features that are inherent in it. The lines in this stage were used to define the features of the cityscape in a repetitive manner.



Plate II, Title, Hanyan Kasuwa II, Medium, Oil on canvas, Size, 122 x 152cm, Year 2008
Hanyan Kasuwa II 2008, Plate II

This painting was developed from plate I. In this painting, forms and shapes in the composition are yet to lose their basic shapes as they are represented with different kinds of vertical lines, their forms and shapes are no longer outlined and definitive. The colours used in the composition are yellow, ochre, brown and blue with the dominant colours being yellow, ochre and brown, which were applied raw and tinted in the roofing sheets of the stall to the right side. Deep blue and deep brown colours alongside short and long vertical lines were used to cast shadow below the roofs, the vehicles and at the stall in the market.

In order to enhance the aesthetic appeals of the cityscape, the background is painted in a dark grayish, brown hue which complements the entire palette of the composition. The vertical lines were applied allowing a gap between each line to the background colour to show through and be part of the whole composition given it the visual impression of a layered painting.

Total Abstraction

This is the third stage and final category of works in the study. At this stage there is complete distortion and non-representation of all the elements in the cityscape into different vertical planes. The lines which represented forms in the semi abstract, have become totally abstracted as the vertical lines have expanded and assumed the place of objects found in the cityscape. This is heightened and extreme distortion of forms

thus creating an entirely unrecognizable body of works. The illusion of depth became more complex and subject to pure perceptual illusion.



Plate III, Title, Rainfall, Medium Oil on Canvas, Size 80 x 100cm, Year 2008

Rainfall, 2009, Plate III

The forms and shapes of the elements in the composition titled *Rainfall* in plate III have almost lost their forms. They have been vertically de-emphasised to a point that some of the lines of the buildings, and vehicles are running from top to bottom of the canvas giving an impression of a reflection on the road. It is a busy painting with vibrant vertical lines of different value and weight moving fast and aggressively across the canvas.

This painting is set in the afternoon thus, having its background in dominant tint of browns, yellow ochre and blue hues.

Summary

In the course of this study, the researcher was faced with the challenge of representing the aesthetic appeals of Zaria cityscape in vertical lines. This was guided by the objectives of the study which were to represent the selected streets areas of the cityscape in vertical lines and to exploit the dynamic qualities of vertical lines for painting. This was done through the participant observation method and the studio experimental method from which drawing and photographs taken are used to create paintings. From this, it was discovered that it is possible to create a variety of aesthetic expressions with pure vertical lines.

Findings of the Study

In the course of executing the paintings in this study the following were discovered:

1. It was found that there were more linear features inherent in our environment, than a causal observation can reveal.

2. There is the notion that lines do not exist in the environment but the researcher, in this study, was able to show the contrary.
3. It was found that it is possible to create a variety of aesthetic expressions with vertical lines using the different time of the day.
4. A contemplation on vertical line composition creates diverse perceptual experience that can enrich our experience of landscape and cityscapes in general.
5. The reduction of realistic cityscape to linear forms brings out the intrinsic aesthetic quality of the cityscapes in painting.
6. Looking at the vertical line paintings gives an impression of a rainfall especially the painting in plate III titled *Rainfall*.

Conclusion

In appropriating line, the vertical type of line in representing the cityscape created an exciting experience. The orientation of the structures and elements in the cityscape are inclined towards vertical positions. The features of forms have in them vertical linear characteristic that are adaptable for painting. Beyond the aesthetically appealing forms of the cityscape, the researcher in this study creatively produced recognizable and unrecognizable paintings.

Recommendation

It is hoped that artists will make use of the recommendations made to create an insight for expression in cityscape painting.

The researcher recommends that artist should continue to look at their physical environment for inspiration. This research approach is recommended to artist seeking a new way into abstract linear paintings to represent their expressions.

Study in vertical linear features should be encouraged amongst artists because it will highly increase creativity and expose the mind to capture and represent only the essence of an element than with actual details.

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