

WASTE SYNDROME: A LOOK AT AYO AINA'S INSTALLATION ART

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Abstract

The wave of social, ecological and cultural changes that swept the world and artistic expression in the 1960s has significantly led to the growth and advent of modern techniques, the pace of life which brought an accompanying guarantee for the dissemination of new ideas and achievements. The desire to modify existing art tradition has led to the full emergence of performance and installation art. This development could be as a result of an artistic response to social influence and for intellectual reasons. Installation art is seen as an artistic genre of site-specific three-dimensional work designed to transform the perception of space. The modern form of installation came to prominence in the 1970s. This form of art is traced to artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Kurt-Schwitters Merz. It is the desire of a new artistic order in Nigeria, which Ayo Aina's, having been challenged by the waste being generated in the country, reacted to by making social commentaries with his art, by using waste materials as the medium of expression. The constant exploration beyond the 2-dimensional boundaries guided the artist in his current experimentation with installation art. His works are imbued with sentiments and humor on social, environmental and political issues. Among his works are *Jolly Ride*, *The Journey so far*, *Stigma*, and *Globalization*. The messages embedded in his installation art have intrigued man, engaging him in a visual dialogue. The paper examines Ayo Aina's installation art created using waste materials.

Key Words: Installation, waste materials, exploration, experimentation, visual dialogue, Syndrome

Introduction

The late 1960s marked the beginning of a wave of social, ecological and cultural change that swept the world. The impetus or art growth stemmed largely from the advent of modern techniques. As with the various art movements, it appears that the wish to modify existing art tradition has led to the full emergence of art forms such as performance and installation art. Deepwell in Yusuf (2007) observes that the emergence of both performance and installation arts could be as a result of an artistic response to social influence and for intellectual reasons. Installation is relatively a new approach in contemporary art emerging out of the discipline-blurring, irreverent artistic experimentations of the 1960s and 1970s. Wilson and Lack (2008) define installation as the term used to describe mixed media construction or assemblage, usually designed for a specific place and for a temporary period of time. Installations are works that often occupy the entire room or gallery space that the spectator invariably has to work through in order to engage fully with the work of art. However, some installations are designed simply to be walked around and contemplated upon or are so fragile that they can only be viewed from a doorway or one end of a room.

Installation online (2014), defines installation art as an artistic genre of site-specific, three-dimensional works designed to transform the perception of a space. Generally, the term is applied to interior spaces, whereas exterior interventions are often called Land art; however, the boundaries between these terms overlap. Installation art can be either temporary or permanent. Installation artworks have been constructed in exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries, as well as public and private spaces. The genre incorporates a very broad range of everyday and natural materials, which are often chosen for their evocative qualities. It also incorporates new media such as video, sound, performance, immersive virtual reality and the internet. Many installations are site-specific in that they are designed to exist only in the space for which they were created. Thus, it is actually where modern installation art takes its bearing from, site-specific, that is, installations are constructions assembled on sites and usually gigantic. It sometimes involves the use of many materials or objects to form a whole.

Installation online (2014) also states that installation, as a nomenclature for a specific form of art came into being not too long ago. Wilson and Lack opine that, in 1961 in New York, class Oldenburg created an early environment, the Store from which his counter and plates with potato and ham comes. One of the environmental installations, using light, is that of James

Turrell's miscellaneous materials (mixed media) light and sound have remained fundamental to installation.

The modern form of installation came to prominence in the 1970's. The form of art was traced to artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters's Merz. It is said to have been in existence since prehistoric times, but was adopted and made popular by the mid-twentieth century. Before this time, terms such as *Environment*, *Project Art* and *Temporary art* have been used to describe installation art. Based on his works produced from 1957 onwards American artist, Allan Kapreue is said to be one of the originators of *environment art*. The creation of installations became a major art and in modern art from that time increasingly to about 1990 when many artists made such experiments. This, in essence, means that installation art has always been there, maybe not with the characteristics and form in which we have them today. There has been a transformation, especially in the use of media and content. Out-door abstract sculptures of some early masters are installations in nature, that is, they are designed to fit into specific locations. (Installation online, 2014).

Ikiddeh in Aliyu (2006) assert that, contemporary Nigerian art has come a long way, finding its path through the wilderness of experiments and schools of various orientations. It has over time matured into a formidable expressive force for both the artist and the society in which it is produced. In the light of what modern artists do, the styles used in executing their works, the materials employed and the source(s) of motivational factors (s), inspiration with which they are influenced to create artworks, are among factors that the author has considered necessary to study Ayo Aina's installation artworks. The article assesses, analyse and interpret some of Ayo's installation art. It traces the artists' educational background as well as his contributions to modern Nigerian art. It is believed that the analysis of some of his works will give room for a better understanding of the artist and what he has done between 2003 and 2013. Ayo Aina is considered prolific contemporary Nigerian artist, with the desire for new artistic order in the country. Having been challenged by the amount of waste being generated in Nigeria, his reaction to this waste challenge is to use such waste generated to social commentaries with his art, directly or indirectly by engaging these waste materials as a medium of expression.

To some, these waste items are convertible resource materials which they employ as an instrument of visual expression. Ayo Aina has created artworks from waste by converting all sorts of waste. His works are technical, artistic and are unique. His materials are transformed into exquisite mixed media works that echo new and precedential aesthetics.

About the Artist

Aina is one of the emerging artists who is very eager in search for new ways of expression. Ayo Aina is a graduate of the premier Zaria art school which is now the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He was born on the 12th of August, 1969 in Kano State of Nigeria. Ayo graduated in 1990 with a Bachelor's Degree and in 1996 with a Master's degree, specialising in painting. Since leaving the university he has practiced as a full-time studio artist and has participated in several art workshops and the Dakar Biennale in May 2010. Aina has had 4 one-man exhibitions, showcasing his installations and paintings. *Deadline*, the most recently held at the Goethe Institute, Lagos in 2008 was acknowledged in the New York-based art editorial Art forum. He is a recipient of several awards, including Nigerian Art Council Prize for the Best Student in Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1990. Ayo's works can be found in public places in Nigeria, such as, the National Library of Nigeria, The National Assembly, Abuja International Trade Fair Complex, Kaduna National Insurance Corporation of Nigeria (NICON), Public Limited Company (PLC), Abuja Northern Nigeria Cement Company, Sokoto, Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) Headquarters, Kaduna and in the Constitutional Court of South Africa and the Mojo Gallery, Dubai.

Ayo Aina is also a prolific Mosaic/Mural designer with over 50 large panels adorning banks such as Central Bank of Nigeria and Nigeria Export Import Bank (NEXIM), Abuja. Federal Ministries of Finance and Justice Abuja and institutions in Nigeria such as Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna. He is a member of several professional bodies including the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA).

Literature Review

Yusuf (2007) traced the development of performance and installation art to its present status as essentially coming from the Futurists, Dadaist, Constructivist and the Surrealists. Performance

and installation are two kinds of art that uphold the status of ideas beyond the significance of materials or productions. The tradition of site-specific works has been traced back to prehistoric cave paintings, but there are close analogies in some of the elaborate Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s, with their fun-fair-like atmospheres, in the room-filling *Merz art objects* construction of Kurt Schwitters, Yves Klein's exhibition of an empty room, *The void*, Marcel Duchamp and his use of the *readymade*.

In 1958 Allan Kaprow used the term *Environment* (this is sometimes considered the earliest example of an installation in the sense in which the term is now understood). The word Installation came into common use in the 1970s. It has its root such as Marcel Duchamp and were often impermanent and could be seen as part of the movement against the fashionable collectable art object. However, many installations are now intended for permanent display. An unlikely example is the 1987 installation work by the British Sculptor Richard Wilson, which consists of a room filled with used sump oil. An example of a more traditional installation is the *Reign of Narcissism* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1989) by the American artist, Barbara Bloom (Encyclopedia, 2014).

The Encyclopedia (2014) reports that, "installations in the 1980s and 1990s in Europe, Africa/Nigeria were increasingly characterized by network of operations involving interaction among complex architectural settings, environmental sites and extensive use of everyday objects in ordinary contexts. A number of institutions started focusing on Installation art from the 1980s onwards, suggesting the need for Installation to be seen as a separate discipline. These included the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh and the Museum of Installation in London. In 1994 a book was published entitled *Installation Art*, claiming that this was "arguably the most original, vigorous and fertile form of art today". What is common to nearly all installation art is a consideration of the experience in totality and the problems it may present, is the constant conflict between disinterested criticism and sympathetic involvement.

Considering the above statement and looking at African art of the past in form confirms that Installation is now embraced as a new form of art today outside the continent of Africa has always been, and is generally developed too. Just like painting, sculpture and other forms of visual arts, installation has unique tradition in Africa. In most traditional African societies and environments, particularly in shrines, abound creative installations in one form or another. In the shrines where traditional artworks form a major part, other paraphernalia which form part of the entire display are usually installations or wall-hangings. This is the real nature of installation which the West is claiming ownership. This obviously might not be true.

The new form of installation in Africa has a strong foundation in traditional African art practices, which form the bedrock of modern art assimilation in Western art and equally gave birth to installation art which the West classifies as the major part of its post-modernism which Africa is wrongfully excluded. It might be recalled that in the early 20th century Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne and their group developed modern art from African art forms. Western critics and scholars are holding onto the view that any artwork that does not possess certain traits of abstraction is not modern and prefer to label such as 'contemporary', but it should be noted that abstraction is one of the main characteristics of African art. This has been discussed in many art forums both within and outside the African continent and has been put in publication for people to read and take position on this vexed question of the confused use of terms (Wilson and Lack, 2008).

It is not surprising, therefore, that installations are being generally embraced as post-modern art, because installation is not really new to Africa or indeed, to many other societies in the world. Installation has been a common feature of most societies, and what is recent is its full appropriation as whole art. In addition, it may be seen, that some art materials are new to Africa, as they have not been used before. With the improvement of technology over the years, artists are able to explore outside the boundaries that were never explored by artists in the past. The media used is more experimental and bold. They are also usually cross media and may involve sensors and movement when looking at the installations. By using virtual reality as a medium, immersive virtual reality art is produced. It is probably the deepest interactive form of art. At the turn of the 21st century, there arose trend of interactive installations using video, film, sound and sculpture. Suffice to say here, that installation art is developing in Nigeria as in

other countries and is being widely embraced by many modern Nigerian artists in its ramification, for the possibilities it offers for experimentation and creativity.

The contemporary artistic expressions of Africa, according to Egonwa (2005), are necessary evolutionary result of current African artistic environment. The artistic environment encompasses the physical and psychic space accessible to the artist. Environment, therefore serves as a major influence or experience which now condition an artist's world view and sharpens his or her expressions. The more expansive the environment, the wider the creative options in terms of ideas, media and techniques open to the artist. The ideology which rules an artist, the subject matter being addressed, the media, techniques and tools of art production are a combined effort which gives character to the artwork produced.

Famous artists of Africa: The works of El-Anatsui, one of Nigeria's most influential artists, showcase the magnificence of Africa's thriving art culture. Using a variety of unconventional media for his sculptures, the artist remains amongst highly regarded to emanate from the continent Africa (installation.art.org). Born in the town of Anyako Ghana in 1944, Anatsui studied at the College of Art what is now called the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana from 1965 to 1969 before embarking on his teaching career in the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1975. The artist long preferred the use of such media as wood and clay, to sculpt objects tied to traditional Ghanaian ideals and other fascinating subjects. Anatsui found success in sculpture and later transitioned to modern installation art. It was in this genre that he later encountered tremendous success. His works are world renowned and better known for their large scale and the thousands of crumpled and folded metal pieces bound together to form art. These intricate massive pieces, require meticulous construction and demonstrating his magnificent artistic talents. Some of the Anatsui most famous exhibitions are housed within numerous art institutions throughout the United States in states like New York, Iowa, California, Florida and Ohio, including those in the popular Brooklyn Museum and several others.

In the work entitled *After Kings* El-Anatsui gathered several thousands of aluminum tops, flattened them, and joined them together with copper wire to form large wall pieces. These bottle tops have symbolic meaning; He states that "they encapsulate the essence of the alcoholic drinks which were brought to Africa by Europeans "trace items at the time of the earliest contact between Africans and Europeans". *After Kings* changes garbage into a form that resembles a traditional Kente cloth from the Ashanti culture of Ghana. This allusion to cloth explains the mobility of art work. (Stockstat, in Blaise, 2014).

According to Buhari (2011), among the artists in Nigeria who have developed their artistic practice beyond the 2- dimensional expression are El-Anatsui, Osahenye Kainebe, Tunde Babalola, Nnenna Okorie, Bright Ogochukwu Eke, Burns Effiorm, and Jerry Buhari. What is common in these artists and their works is that they explore the 2- dimensional surface from a formalistic perspective to engage with critical social issues that border on cultural identity and environmental issues with their attending political undertones. The choice and use of material often directly reflects issues of a third world's access to modern technology and management of our environment and resources.

Installation and Mixed Media by Bruce Onabrakpeya

According to Onabrakpeya (2010), "Africa is a dumping ground for many Euro-American and Asian goods. How does one therefore, salvage Africa of these unwanted wastes and make the best of an ugly situation?"

Onabrakpeya embarked on installation art from 1995-2005. Installations and Mixed Media created by the artist are characterised by the arrangement of different discarded materials to create an installation. He uses jute bag, animal bones, hides and skin, discarded metals, foil paper, plastics, beads of all colours, used engine spark plugs, discarded computer motherboard, PVC pipes, bottle corks, CDs plate, chains, twines, and cowries. The unconventional use of materials that have been sourced by him and used in art exemplify the height of material appropriation, born out of the need to solve societal and personal artistic problems.

These installations are essential to draw attention to the importance of protecting the environment. This perhaps is what motivated Ayo to join forces with other installation artists to

realise the overall philosophy of waste to wealth which Nigeria is preaching in all aspects of her socio-economic life.

Analysis of Selected Installations of Ayo Aina

The constant urge to stretch the exploratory limit of the 2-D surface guided Ayo Aina into his current experimentation in installation art. Through his training and researches, he acquired skills and knowledge in painting. Schneider (2006) asserts that "Aina's works, declare a position. They comment with sentiments and humor on social, environmental and political issues". Some of the titles of his works are *Jolly Ride*, *The Journey So Far*, *Stigma* and *Red Handed*. Aina comically examines the gradual transition of society into nothing that is socially enviable. The artist then picks up symbolic objects to further produce works such as *National Cake*, *Pump Price*, finally *Globalization*. Schneider further describes Aina's works as conceptually unique. A thoughtful artist who understands his society and analyses same through his experimental art. According to Schneider, Aina belongs to the group of talented artists who are being discovered and nurtured by the Goethe-institute. Schneider continues, with his irritating installations and collages which cast a dazzling light on societal and environmental developments and aberrations; Ayo Aina distances himself from traditional and conventional art production. He is a precise and blunt commentator of the social and global context he lives in with unconventional and provocative found objects such as rat traps, toilet bowls, nails, bullet holes, hospital beds, rice and cake. He employs humor and irony as his most effective tools to communicate his messages".

As a practitioner of the multimedia art, Aina is attracted to unfamiliar, provocative formats and the use of uncommon exploratory platforms. His works explore subjects like contemporary slavery, child abuse and environmental issues. Schneider (2008) describes Ayo as a genuine African artist, who though distances himself from the traditional and conventional art production, still artistically reflects issues of his environment and society and more importantly issues which result from Africa's relationship to "The West" and other regions. The world of art is indeed strange and diverse. Just when you feel you have seen it all, something even more creative or at times bizarre comes to fore.

Aina believes that, the most vital part of being an artist is in reaching out to the society and influencing it positively. Thus, to be able to do that, the artist's freedom of expression remains the most potent weapon, particularly in a fast-changing technological world. Duniya (2009), explains that, Ayo Aina's recent installations he uses a wide range of materials in reconstructing images of a confused and despairing society.

In view of the literature on Ayo that has been reviewed, and the comments of news reporters and editors in some of Nigerian newspapers and professionals in the field of art. It reveals that Ayo Aina has contributed to the development of artistic expression in modern Nigerian art. He has participated in about 17 groups and 4 solo exhibitions between, 1988-2010.

In his recent works, Aina has been focusing on his desire to make large Scale installations that comment on various inhuman and anti-social experiences of society. The artist states:

Although I was trained as a painter, the constant urge to stretch the explorative limit of the 2-D surface guided me into my current experimentation in installation art. The 2-D became less effective as a weapon in my hand to express my anger at the various inhuman and anti-social experiences of a society whose failures have been aided by her own internal systems and pervasive, materialistic propensities. My art employ metaphor, humor and irony to address critical issues of social and political injustices, and environmental degradation, Industrialisation, with its attendant problem of waste generation, offers me a rich menu of junk to satisfy my creative appetite. As an artist in this recycling age, I see myself positioned as a recycling machine powered by mixed media and multimedia.

While commenting on Ayo Aina's works and the inspiration behind them, Schneider (2006) states thus: Aina's works ...declare a position. They comment with sentiments, wit and humor on social, environmental and political issues. Aina's works stand out not only due to his creativity but also due to his highest artistic professionalism and exactness.

Therefore, in the analysis and discussion of works, this paper identifies and classifies the installation works of Ayo into two groups namely *Vestiges & Debris* and *Deadline for Positive Change*. The first groups of installation work of Ayo Aina are mixed media, made from different statements on environmental, political and social issues. Two themes dominate vestiges and Debris. These are Man's inhumanity to man, and the environment. First to be mention in this group is *Globalisation* (Plate I).



Plate I Ayo Aina, *Globalisation*, Found Objects and Firewood 100 x 120cm, 2005, Artist's collection
Globalisation (Plate I) is a round object made of chicken mesh with thick wires as support is filled with waste papers and placed on a firewood metal stove. What's cooking? That's the first reaction a viewer may have on seeing Aina's *Globalisation*. The answer is clear, so is the message: to inform his viewers the extent at which man has been destroying the earth. Aina's stove is not the common single inlet stove, but one with three stands as firewood pots. Each hosts at least three pieces of half- burnt woods. The spherical defect filled with waste papers and painted white is a metaphor for the word/earth.

The heating of the earth in his work confirms man's crime against himself. Through the effective use of satin, Aina warns that no one is safe from global warming. But sadly, the fragile group of the society that is most helpless the situations are the children.

The freedom of creative expression, therefore, remains the most potent weapon used in the production of *Globalisation*. Aina made use of unconventional materials for the creation of the work. Such materials include waste paper, firewood, and a giant tripod metal stove. Aina stylistically places the globe on the giant tripod with fire heating under it. *Globalisation* addresses man's inhumanity to himself and his environment.



Plate II: Ayo Aina, *Victims*, found objects, 2006 Artist's collection.

Victims takes viewers into one of the tragedies of global warming. Stretched on what looks like a hospital bed are six pairs of children's legs, covered in the same white paint as the bed, the

white cloth covering the line of legs faintly exposes the lifeless bones of the children towards the end of the ankles. The only colour in this work, are the pairs of rubber sandals on the legs, which gives the age group and identity of the victims as the bodies vanish under the bed-cover. The work shows the capacity of man harming his fellow, either as victims of war or epidemic like the Human Immune Deficiency Virus & Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) all lying dead. What is left of them are their legs still shot in infant shoes. Whatever is responsible for cutting short the lives of these innocent victims has ultimately cut short the hope of a generation and no doubt sees the citizens of this country as victims of bad leadership. Could the bodies have so decomposed that they have become invisible? Again, why are all the feet wearing sandals?



Plate III: Ayo Aina, *Path to glory*, found objects, 2006 Artist's collection.

Path to Glory" (Plate III) is in search of an interlude to diffuse the coldness of *Globalisation* and *Victims*, *Path to Glory* could help in filling that gap. The artist continues to display his horror script from the top of this work by presenting images of success, at the steps at the bottom, are thorns; blood stained thorns, from there, continues with footprints of blood, pronounced, against the all-white paint of the work *Path to Glory* is streamed with spikes. It is consistent with the doctrine of suffering, which preaches that obstacles show man the way to freedom and strength. They are either placed in his way to teach and develop him or they are reactions of some long-forgotten karmic debt, which he is obliged to settle. The red footprints attest to the fact that the feet of the pilgrim drew blood by treading on the metal spikes. The steps before the door represent the spirit's ascent. The artist seems to console his compatriots with the philosophy that suffering enables life or that life is enriched from pain. Life in the country may be hard but there are still spiritually enriching lessons to draw from it. *Path to Glory* is also instructive, hard and bloody but ultimately, leads to a glorious way. So, there is a way out no matter how difficult it may be.



Plate IV: Ayo Aina, *EFCC*, found objects, 2006 Artist's collection.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commissions (*EFCC*) was created in 2006, with found objects. In "*EFCC*", three chairs with burners underneath are linked to a gas cylinder on top of a three-legged stand. The empty chairs are waiting for their next victims. Newspaper cutting of the activities of the *EFCC* is spread on the floor. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission is a Nigerian Law enforcement agency that investigates financial crimes such as advance fee fraud (419), fraud and money laundering. The *EFCC* was established in 2003, partially in response to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), which named Nigeria as one of the twenty-three countries non-cooperative in the international community's efforts to fight money laundering. The agency has its head office in Abuja. *EFCC* is also instructive especially for politicians, public office holders and top Government functionaries. It is an agency put in place to checkmate the rate at which government funds are siphoned from Nigeria.

The Mission Statement of *EFCC* is to get rid of Economic and Financial Crimes and to effectively coordinate the domestic effort of the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing.



Plate V: Ayo Aina, *Free Lunch*, found objects, Plate and rat 2006 Artist's collection.

Free Lunch (Plate V) is another *EFCC* related installation. *Free Lunch* drips with cynicism, eschews a dinner setting, but on the table, there are (8) traps with eggs on them and at the centre of the table is a plate containing three eggs. In addition, the chairs have spikes that can prevent anybody from sitting down.

The so-called *Free Lunch* could be a trap. Whether this is based on personal experience or not, the artist is once more drawing his viewers' attention to the lawfulness of creation. One should not or never expect to reap what or where he has not sown.

Conclusion

Ayo Aina has made appreciable contributions in the development of contemporary Nigerian art. The uniqueness in style and types of materials used for the art installation attests to the freedom of expression he has found in his practice. Ayo Aina's talent distances him from the traditional and conventional art production. In addition, the artist is always conscious of the environment in some of his installations. The novelty of approach, the courageous reinvention and manipulation of new media has gained him respect and recognition. On the whole, it is hoped that this paper will serve as a useful guide and source of reference for future researchers on Ayo Aina in an area that has not been tackled, like his paintings, murals and mosaics.

Ayo Aina's installation art has a universal language that cut across ethnic, cultural, social, political and religious barriers and use of waste materials, to communicate ideas and ideals in the society. The messages embedded in his installation art have intrigued man, engaging himself in a visual dialogue.

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