

## **THE LANGUAGE OF LINES: A STUDY OF STYLISTIC VARIATIONS IN THE DRAWINGS OF ADIWU, TALATU ONKALA, AND NADAMA MUSTAPHA GARBA.**

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### **Abstract**

This study, titled “The Language of Lines: A Study of Stylistic Variations in the Drawings of Adiwu, Talatu Onkala, and Nadama Mustapha Garba, investigates two Nigerian artists’ use of lines as a stylistic and expressive element in drawing. The research explores the formal qualities of line, such as weight, direction, character, and rhythm, as seen in the artworks of Adiwu, Talatu Onkala, and Nadama Mustapha Garba. Organic and nature-inspired linear patterns characterise Onkala’s works. Mustapha’s illustrations exhibit conceptual visual elements with floral and socio-political subject matter. Employing formal analysis, contextual interpretation, and archived research, the study reveals the individual stylistic idiom and cultural sense embedded in their linear practices: Onkala’s lines evoke natural systems and introspection, while Mustapha’s lines often convey conceptual abstraction and socio-political meaning. The findings provide insights into how contemporary Nigerian artists employ line to create diverse visual languages that engage cultural, conceptual, and aesthetic dialogues.

**Keywords:** Lines, Drawing, Stylistic variations, Adiwu, Talatu Onkala, Nadama Mustapha Garba, Formal/Contextual analysis, Documentary, Research, Contemporary, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Line remains a fundamental and expressive element in visual art and drawing practice. Within the Nigerian contemporary art scene, artists use line not just for structural depiction but as a visual language tool to communicate emotion, culture, ideology, and socio-political commentary. This study focuses on the stylistic variations in the use of lines in the drawings of two Nigerian artists: Adiwu and Talatu Onkala, whose linear expressions are organic, web-like, and patterned. Onkala's works are exemplars of line as a tool for natural metaphor while Nadama Mustapha Garba who explores line within conceptual and graphic tradition (which is visual motifs of recurring symbols, patterns and stylistic elements), suggesting deeper cultural narratives but continued exploring some of the attributes of conceptual art such as appropriation, and use of unconventional media, but used just charcoal, pastel, and graphite in the creation of his works which makes it unique and giving him the ability of making a cocktail of philosophies, discarding what is not required at a specific time and highlighting what is preferred to achieve the required outcome. Both artists represent different approaches to linear expression within Nigerian contemporary drawing practice. This research aims to analyse and compare how these drawing styles articulate and postulate visual languages within contemporary Nigerian drawing practice.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Regardless of the critical function that line plays in creative composition and expression, there is no scholastic record addressing stylistic and contextual variations of line in contemporary Nigerian drawing. While general studies on drawing and painting techniques in Nigeria exist, focused comparative investigations into how individual artists like Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba uniquely explore and manipulate line remain limited. This lack of critical and scholarly documentation has resulted in a lack of interest in how line functions not only as a formal element but also as a strong visual language for transmitting cultural, conceptual, and personal narratives. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this scholarly gap by analysing and comparing the distinct linear styles and contextual influences that characterise the works of these artists.

## **Aim and Objectives**

This study aims to critically examine how line functions both stylistically and expressively in the drawings of Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba. The research seeks to explore how these artists use lines to convey personal and cultural statements and engage the spectators through a unique linear idiom. Specifically, the study sets out to achieve several interconnected objectives. First, it seeks to analyse the formal qualities of line as used by each artist, paying attention to other relevant elements such as rhythm, texture, shape, form, space, as well as line directionality, weight, and spatial modulation. Consequently, this is achieved using the method of overlapping, size and scale, perspective, value, and contrast. By doing so, the research uncovers the distinct stylistic signatures that define each artist's approach to drawing; consequently, it will help understand the artists' oeuvre, provenance, market value, historical significance, and attribution.

Secondly, the study examines the cultural, environmental, and conceptual factors that inform the artists' choices in line deployment. This involves investigating how personal background, socio-cultural influences, and thematic intentions shape the way the line is utilised in their respective works. Furthermore, the research intends to compare and contrast the stylistic differences between the two artists, with a focus on how their divergent approaches to line affect the interpretation and reception of their drawings. Finally, the study seeks to situate the analysis within the broader framework of contemporary Nigerian drawing practices, contributing to ongoing scholarly conversations about stylistic variation, identity, and visual language in Nigerian art.

## **Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on analysing selected line-based drawings produced between 2009 and 2020 by Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba. The scope is limited to pen-and-ink and mixed media drawings where line is the primary compositional element. Both formal (visual) and contextual (cultural, thematic) dimensions of line use are considered. The research also

contextualises both artists within the contemporary Nigerian art discourse, particularly in relation to linear stylistics.

### **Literature Review**

The concept of line as a fundamental element in art and design has been extensively discussed in art scholarship. According to Ocvirk et al. (2002), line remains one of the most expressive and versatile elements in visual composition, capable of defining forms, creating textures, and conveying both movement and emotion. Similarly, Arnheim (1974) asserts that line is not merely a boundary but a psychological and perceptual tool that guides the viewer's experience of an artwork. In the Nigerian context, scholarly works on drawing and linear expression have increasingly gained attention. Notable among them is the research by Gushem (2006), which examines 'The Language of Linear Forms' in contemporary Nigerian Painting, emphasising the communicative power of line as both a formal and narrative tool. In addition, Oloidi (2002) discusses stylistic developments in modern Nigerian art, stressing how artists manipulate formal elements like line to establish personal styles and cultural identity.

Specific to Adiwu, Talatu Onkala, several studies highlight her distinctive use of organic lines and environmental references. Adiwu and Gushem (2015), in their jointly published research, discuss how spider webs serve as both inspiration and metaphor in her linear explorations, suggesting that her work transforms everyday natural patterns into aesthetic statements. Similarly, Adiwu (2016) provides an aesthetic overview of her spider cobweb paintings, focusing on how she uses both delicate and forceful lines to simulate natural erosion patterns and webs.

On the other hand, Nadama Mustapha Garba has contributed scholarly articles exploring the dialogic relationship between line and floral motifs, notably in his 2019 study titled *A Visual Dialogue Between Lines and Floral Motifs in Painting*. He explains how he integrates controlled linear arrangements to communicate themes of nature and cultural symbolism. His works often show a calculated, geometric manipulation of line, in contrast to Onkala's more organic and free-flowing style.

Furthermore, general theoretical art texts such as Barthes (1977) and Gude (2004) provide interpretive tools for understanding how line can carry semiotic and contextual meanings that extend beyond formal aesthetics into the realm of visual communication. Sullivan (2005) also emphasises that art practice should be viewed within its social and cultural contexts, making contextual analysis vital for any study focused on contemporary Nigerian artists.

Despite these existing contributions, there remains a notable gap in comparative studies that focus on stylistic variations in line-based drawings among contemporary Nigerian artists, especially between female and male practitioners from different geographical zones and cultural backgrounds. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by providing a comparative formal and contextual analysis of line usage in the works of Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba, thereby advancing scholarly knowledge in contemporary Nigerian drawing studies.

Kalilu and Woods (n.d.) assert that lines in Nigerian drawing serve communicative and typological functions. According to Kalilu (n.d.), line remains one of the most versatile elements of visual language in Nigerian art, capable of serving descriptive and symbolic functions. Kalilu and Woods (2014) further emphasise the narrative potential of line in African art, noting that Nigerian artists frequently use linear arrangements to embed cultural identity, social commentary, and personal narratives within their compositions. Adiwu Talatu Onkala's work engages systematic line patterns drawn from nature (e.g., spider-webs), emphasised in her thesis and journal articles. Nadama Mustapha Garba's exploration of graphic line as a conceptual visual language is noted in academic critiques. However, there is limited direct comparative discourse on line styles in contemporary Nigerian drawing, creating a scholarly niche for this study.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design. The research methodology is structured around visual (formal), contextual analysis, and documentary research. The study employed formal image analysis of the preferred artworks by both artists. This includes examining the composition and detailed description of the visual elements and principles of design, such as line, shape, texture, and space. Adiwu Talatu Onkala's drawings show evidence of organic and tactile exploration of line with composition resembling spider webs and natural erosion patterns. Conversely, Nadama Mustapha Garba employed well-calculated, precise lines that form the artistic representation of flowers in a non-realistic, abstract manner. This style emphasises simplified forms or breaking down flowers into basic shapes and lines, and distorted proportions. This technique results in beautiful, expressive artworks that capture the essence of flowers in a creative, non-literal way.

In addition to formal analysis, the study incorporated contextual analysis as an essential methodological component. This phase focused on understanding the cultural, environmental, and socio-political factors that influence each artist's linear expression. For Adiwu Talatu Onkala, the contextual analysis examined how environmental themes and natural patterns, like spider webs and erosion lines, inspire her work. Her works draw heavily on environmental contexts, reflecting her fascination with natural formations like spider webs and eroded landscapes (Adiwu & Gushem, 2015). These serve as metaphors for resilience, cultural memory, and human interconnectivity. For Nadama Mustapha, the analysis explored how socio-political realities, floral symbolism, and conceptual narratives from Northern Nigeria influence his controlled, graphic, linear style. His drawings are contextually rooted in socio-political commentary and conceptual art traditions. His use of floral motifs and linear precision often serves as a visual metaphor for growth, change, and social dialogue (Mustapha, 2019). His drawings also align with contemporary Nigerian movements that use conceptual line art for public discourse.

Lastly, the research involved a documentary review of relevant literature, including academic journal articles such as Adiwu, T. O., & Gushem, P. O. (2015). *The Spider and its Web*; Adiwu, T. O. (2016). *Spider Cobweb Paintings of Talatu Adiwu: An Aesthetic Overview*; Gushem, P. (2006). *The Language of Linear Forms in Contemporary Nigerian Painting* and Oloidi, O. (2002). *Trends in Contemporary Nigerian Art. The Art Historian: exhibition catalogues, artists' statements, and online scholarly resources*. This helped to situate the study within the broader discourse of contemporary Nigerian art and drawing practices.

By triangulating data from these multiple sources, the study ensured depth, credibility, and contextual relevance in the analysis and interpretation of findings. It concluded the stylistic variations in the linear practices of Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba.

## **Conceptual Framework.**

This study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical concepts: Formalism, Semiotics, and Conceptual Art Theory, all of which provide a multi-dimensional lens for analysing the stylistic variations in the drawings of Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba. Formalism serves as the foundation for analysing the visual and structural qualities of line in the selected works. This theory focuses on the formal elements of art such as line, shape, texture, rhythm, and spatial arrangement (Bell, 1914; Greenberg, 1961). Through this lens, the study critically examines how each artist utilises line to create distinct stylistic effects independent of content or narrative.

The study employs Semiotics (Theory of Signs) to investigate how lines function as visual signifiers carrying symbolic meanings within each artist's work. Based on the semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Roland Barthes (1977), the research explores how Onkala and Mustapha's linear expressions communicate environmental, cultural, and socio-political narratives to their audience.

The research also draws on Contextual Art Theory, which asserts that artworks are not isolated objects but are deeply embedded within social, historical, and cultural contexts (Gude, 2004;

Sullivan, 2005). This framework is beneficial for examining how each artist's geographical background, gender, identity, environmental experiences, and Nigeria's socio-political environment influence their linear styles.

By integrating these three conceptual frameworks, the study achieves a broader understanding of both the formal qualities and the contextual meanings embedded in the linear language of Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha. This combined approach allows for a richer, multi-layered interpretation of the artists' works, balancing visual aesthetics with cultural and conceptual significance.

Additionally, scholars like Kalilu and Woods (n.d) have highlighted the centrality of line as both a formal and communicative device in African drawing traditions. Their works argue that linearity in contemporary Nigerian visual arts is not purely decorative but serves as a critical narrative tool that conveys history, identity, and socio-political themes. This theoretical position provides a relevant framework for analysing the linear styles of Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha (Kalilu & Woods, 2014).

### **Biographical Sketches of the Artists**

#### **Adiwu Talatu Onkala (PhD)**

A prolific painter from Zaria Art School, born on December 7, 1982, in Kwajjaffa in Borno State of Nigeria. She is an indigene of Plateau State, where she attended and obtained her primary and post-primary education certificates from 1990 to 2001. She has earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree (B.A) in Fine Arts (2006), Master of Fine Art Degree in (2010), a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (2012) from the National Teachers Institute, Kaduna-Nigeria and has also completed her Doctoral studies where she was awarded a PhD in Painting from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in October 2015, with this, Adiwu Talatu Onkala is the first female Doctorate holder in the studio area produced by Zaria Art School. She widely took part in art exhibitions in Nigeria and abroad, including participation in important group shows, seminars, and workshops.

Through her body of works and publications, she has established a landmark within the Nigerian painting scene by departing from the recurring mode of creative and realistic interpretation of natural forms to that of abstract or semi-naturalistic representations of nature. She is also concerned with creating a platform for young female artists and academics to follow their dreams of achieving across disciplines such as textile design, ceramics, and sculpture. She aspires to continue making aesthetic statements using natural forms aligned with postmodernist ideologies in modern Nigerian painting. Adiwu Talatu Onkala is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, where she is steadily rising up the ranks (Shirley Kabwato, 2018).

**Works of Adiwu Talatu Onkala;**



**Plate 1: *Teething*, Adiwu Talatu Onkala, 16.5 x 23.4 ft, 2019, Private Collection, Maiduguri-Borno, Nigeria, Pen and Ink on Cartridge Paper.**

*Teething* 2019 is a black pen and ink drawing set against a white background. The semi-naturalist composition is a partial realistic rendition of what one may describe as eroded teeth. The composite position is that of an exaggerated, perfectly full lip exposing three horizontal levels of teeth at various stages of disintegration. The upper lip is shown to have been pushed upwards, giving a clear and unobstructed view of the gum's teeth. The lower lip, which is represented as fuller, also provides a clear, unobstructed view of the teeth.

The central focus for the viewer, as probably intended by the artist, is the displaced layers of the teeth. Inspired by the actual teeth of an adult but represented in a distorted and somewhat conceptual manner, the viewer is exposed to not the regular two rows of teeth but three layers/rows of finally crafted teeth, seeming to crush each other both horizontally and vertically. Each tooth is rendered in clear-cut lines of black and little to no visual disturbance, except for the occasional and careful overlapping of teeth against the middle and lower rows. In between the upper and middle rows of teeth, the artist introduces abstract floral motifs, a symbolic testament to the consistent growth that envelops all natural things.

While the use of lines is minimal, straightforward, and generally boundary and shape-defining, the upper and lower lips are besieged with an array of lines that both elevate and confuse the visual

journey of the viewer. The interplay of lines is predominantly vertical in movement but aligns in a linear manner surrounding the upper arched lip. The interplay of lines partitions both the upper and lower lip and the surrounding areas into uneven spaces which are subsequently filled with either thick, thin, wavy lines; amoebic free-flowing shapes surrounded by dark or textured black ink, or are left plain white, thus enhancing both contrast depth as well as perspective.

On the left side of the teeth composition, the lines converge to form other organic forms/shapes of varying sizes made to stand out by the surrounding textured background achieved through the hachy movement of pen on the white surface. At the same time, the upper lip and its surrounding surface are purely an interplay and display of free-flowing lines complemented by equally diagonally placed free-flowing forms that align with the arching placement of the upper lip; the surrounding spaces of the lower lip showcase floral, abstract shapes and motifs. Additionally, the use of lines in the surrounding spaces of the lower lip is thinner and more closely clustered than that of the upper lip area, which is more spacious and almost devoid of any identifiable motifs. While the upper section of the work is a display of strong, heavy lines and white spaces, the lower section is a visual display of thin, wavy lines, floral motifs, and organic and amoebic patterns closely clustered together.

Nonetheless, shapes in this drawing define boundaries through the use of line. They are irregular shapes, with straight lines, curved, wavy, squiggly, jagged, rough, smooth, and solid lines. In this work, the shape of a closed line serves the function of lines, giving direction and leading the spectator visually. Additionally, the work is not dominated by any particular shape, as there is a variety of shapes within the composition. Balance, which is the distribution of visual weight in the composition, creates a sense of order, equivalence, and solidity with visual stability within the scene. Also, contrast is found in the composition, which generates visual appeal and a stark difference within and around the dental area in the work. There is the employment of black and white values to create depth and intrigue in the composition; there is size contrast in the linear rendition of the teeth to generate visual hierarchy and focus.

Textual contrast is also applied in the use of different linear design textures to add visual appeal and represent differences within the scene. Visual emphasis is used to draw attention to the focal point of this drawing, which is the 'Teething' in linear brevity (this refers to the use of concise and efficient lines to convey the essence of the subject, capturing the essential characteristics and features of the subject with a minimal number of lines, avoiding unnecessary details). The simplified representation of the dental anatomy is the aspect of the composition that really stands out and catches the viewer's attention. Movement, which has to do with the ways the spectator's eyes travel within the composition, guides the eyes from one element to another in the work. The point of focus in this drawing is the artist's exploration of thin and solid lines to create fine details and evoke a sense of calm, which produces a strong visual presence.

One could argue that the intention of the artist in the purpose of the work is to show the power of linear expressiveness in the rendition of human anatomy in art, and to understand how the body works and consider all its parts. The mood of the work is that of the creative skill and ingenuity of the artist; of being original and inventive in her innovative exploration of concepts and forms reminiscent of Uli's poetic lines. The authors believe that Adiwu Talatu Onkala's drawing of 'Teething' is intended to give a sense of her drawing being deeply rooted in linearity. This is indicated by the dominant use of line throughout the composition. The artist uses lines to direct the observer's eyes across the work. It is these authors view that, the drawing is well organized based on how almost precise and technical use of line, and how visually successful the premeditated theme and mood is portrayed: that is, the artist deliberately choosing and crafting elements to convey a specific message or idea, elicit a particular emotional response from the spectator and creating a cohesive and impactful visual experience.



**Plate2: *The Illusion of Freedom*, Adiwu Talatu Onkala, 2 X 3.45 ft, 2021, Artists Collection Maiduguri, Borno state, Nigeria, Pen and Ink on Cartridge Paper**

This piece is a striking example of Adiwu Talatu Onkala's linear eloquence, executed in pen and ink on cartridge paper in 2021. It is produced on standard-sized paper, and the place of creation was not stated. This is a profile portrait of a young woman in abstract realism, shown from the mid-torso up, against a light background. She is looking up in amazement straight to the viewer's left. On the right side of the composition are multiplicities of solid lines emanating at the back of the head at the background, within the profile are undulating movements of lines as a result of the multiple overlapping of linear impression, there are different type of curvilinear impression on the profile such as simple curve that does not cross itself, complex curve that crosses itself and open curved line that is open when its endpoints do not meet, there are also other curvilinear lines such as swirls, spirals and circles that formed abstract patterns on the composition.

The cheekbone is bounded by curved lines or represented by curved lines. Curvilinear motion is also observed on the neck beneath the jaw. Other lines observed on the composition are vertical lines, horizontal lines, diagonal lines, and zigzag lines. Also, there is the depiction of an oval eye alternated on the cheek, on the torso, and on the forehead. There are also concentric spiral motifs reminiscent of Uli agwo lagwo of southeast linear expression, fixed between the heavy solid lines behind the profile. On the left side of the composition is a space receiving the gaze of the subject. The drawing seems to rely heavily on the elements of lines as a tool of expression, as observed on the profile; there are varieties of curvilinear movements within the scene that produce forms in the artwork. Heavy dark lines are used to define the forms within the composition in curvilinear motion; also, solid horizontal and diagonal lines are used to create the forms on the backdrop of the composition. There is also a swirling flow of linear expression on the general composition; a movement or flow which is created by a uniformly rotating, infinitely long twist and spiral coil. Similarly, there are jagged lines, dashed dotted lines, broken lines, bumpy lines, and fine thin lines at the far left side of the torso within the scene as they flow into the space.

Different kinds of linear impressions within the scene, which are both literal and implied lines, curve lines, smooth lines, solid lines, jagged lines, rough lines, thin lines, all create a calming effect, a sense

of movement and freedom, and an understanding of energy in the composition. The work uses a variety of lines that work together. The use of space in this drawing helps in creating pictorial depth and perspective by the overlapping of the design elements and the use of space versus space crowded with details. The shapes in the work are geometric, having straight lines and perfect curves, horizontal lines and vertical lines; however, the work is not dominated by any one particular shape, as all the shapes are alternated or repeated across the composition. Similarly, the work also uses principles of composition as the shapes in the drawing create balance and a harmonious effect. Contrast is also found in the use of a variety of shapes, like curved lines versus jagged lines or geometric shapes versus natural shapes. The work equally creates a sense of movement as the eyes of the spectator are drawn and guided through the linear impression across the composition.

One could argue that the point of focus is the general composition with special emphasis on the linear patterns in the composition, to evoke a sense of structure, solidity, and form. It appears that the artist's purpose of the composition or what the artist is trying to communicate with the work may be that the experience of freedom might not be a reflection of the reality of the human situation and circumstances. It raises the prospect that people might be radically different from other things in reality, and it opens up the possibility that freedom and even 'reality' might not be an either-or kind of thing. The mood of the work is that of delusion or false belief or judgment about external reality, which is held despite incontrovertible evidence to the contrary, occurring mainly in mental conditions reminiscent of Jonathan Stroud's statement that freedom always comes at a price. The authors believe that this piece might be exploring a sense of what freedom is all about. This is indicated by the line of the composition, which draws the spectator's eyes across the composition following the upward gaze of the subject straight to the viewer's left. In addition, the authors are judging the artwork on how well organised it is, how well done technically, and how successful it is in showing the intended mood and theme.

**Nadama Mustapha Garba (PhD):**

Nadama Mustapha Garba is a citizen of Nigeria from Zamfara State. He holds a bachelor's degree in industrial design from 1997, an M.F.A PhD in 2014 and a PhD in Painting in 2018, all from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; following his degrees, he has used lines in exploring floral forms in painting, and he has also conducted studio research exploring organic vestiges as a medium of social commentary in painting. Garba (2024) posits that the artist enjoys drawing and has produced conceptual drawings that speak to his environment by exploring environmental themes such as nature and human interaction. As an undergraduate student, he had the impression that drawings in general were just ideas sketched on paper for further development with other media as finished artworks. This perception lingered until his encounter with the drawings of Tyrone Geter, an American artist who relocated and lived in Zaria between 1979 and 1986. His drawings were the actual end products, finished artworks that tell stories about his subject matter and their environment. Within the same period, Nadama Mustapha Garba became enthused with the paintings of Gani Odutokun, which created the basis for his interest in lines.

This further developed into a style that came fully to the fore during his Master of Fine Arts Degree (MFA Painting) titled 'A Dialogue Between Lines and Floral Motifs in Paintings'. He has exhibited both solo and in group shows, and his works are widely seen in both private and public spaces. Nadama, as a researcher, has published several of his thoughts in reputable journals like 'Coconut as a Medium for Social Commentary'; 'Art Beyond Aesthetics: An Exploration of Organic Vestiges as a Medium for Social Commentary in Painting', and has attended several conferences, symposiums, and other academic and art activities. Nadama is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

### Works of Nadama Mustapha Garba:



Plate3: *Sarki*, Nadama Mustapha Garba, 99 x 27 cm, 2023, Charcoal on Cartridge Paper

This work showcases Nadama Mustapha Garba's expressive use of line, rendered in charcoal on cartridge paper in 2020. The composition contains dynamic curvilinear and wavy lines arranged in swirling, spiral patterns, creating a sense of rhythm, movement, and three-dimensionality. These patterns symbolise royal messages, emphasising contrast between light and dark values to evoke mood and tension. The drawing uses repetition, harmony, unity, and texture to enhance visual flow and convey Nadama's intended message. Positive and negative spaces interact to create visual illusions, guiding the viewer's eye and adding balance. Central to the piece are the

abstract representations rooted in Hausa traditional culture, using motifs, architectural elements, and clothing designs associated with royalty and palace life. The composition 'Sarki' (Plate 3) depicts stylised human figures with curvilinear lines and geometric shapes, incorporating elements like the alkyabba (robe), rawani (turban), and babanriga (gown) to symbolise royalty. Special attention is given to the depiction of ears sticking out of turbans, symbolising lineage and status. The visual elements in this work include lines varied in thickness, smooth, flowing, and curvilinear to form shapes, direct movement, and suggest emotion: these shapes, which are abstract, geometric, and organic, exhibit free-form structure, adding a sense of naturalness and fluidity to the drawing. The circular forms suggest both masculinity and femininity.



**Plate 4: *Maigida*, Nadama Mustapha Garba, 100 x 30 cm, 2021, Charcoal on Cartridge Paper**

This artwork is another striking example of Nadama Mustapha Garba's linear eloquence, executed in charcoal on cartridge paper in 2021. It presents a curvilinear, abstract composition centred on the symbolic representation of a male figure, 'Maigida' (Plate 4), the family patriarch, using expressive lines and multiple eyes to convey presence, watchfulness, and care. Furthermore, in this abstract composition, the artwork features: three realistically rendered eyes placed at strategic positions (top, bottom, right) to guide the viewer's gaze and create rhythm and dynamism; besides, there is a central male face with a twisted mouth and alert expression, symbolising authority and responsibility. The artist explored curvilinear and a variety of lines, which are thin, thick, diagonal, and implied, that contribute to mood, movement, and harmony. Also, the head is represented in single oval shapes, which represent the eyes, said to be a window to the human soul. The use of these lines that are harmonious with the subject matter seems to be preferred by the artist as they do not appear arbitrarily without an origin or a corresponding base. These types of lines originate from shapes within or at the boundaries of the subject matter, therefore, appearing congruent and not in disagreement with it. They are also not distracting from the focal point in the artwork. There is a strong sense of unity, harmony, rhythm, and emphasis, with deliberate repetition of forms and consistent texture tying the elements together. Balance is achieved through the thoughtful use of shape and space, while contrast between positive (detailed) and negative (open) spaces adds interest.

## **Findings**

The findings from the study reveal that both Adiwu Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha Garba utilise line as a primary compositional and expressive tool, but with distinct stylistic and conceptual approaches that reflect their individual backgrounds, philosophies, and artistic objectives. For Adiwu Talatu Onkala, the study found that organic, fluid, and spontaneous movements characterise her use of line. Her drawings often simulate natural patterns such as spider webs, erosion lines, and other environmental textures. Onkala's lines appear gestural and instinctive, reinforcing her connection to themes of nature, fragility and transience. Her practice reflects a strong sensitivity to environmental inspirations and textural possibilities of line, making her linear style both expressive and symbolic. In contrast, Nadama Mustapha's drawings are marked by controlled, calculated, and repetitive line structures, reflecting a more deliberate and graphic approach. His linear expressions often involve floral motifs, geometric patterns, and structured layering, giving his compositions a decorative yet deeply conceptual quality. Mustapha's use of line is informed by cultural symbolism, personal introspection, and social commentary, making his drawings not only aesthetic objects but also visual narratives embedded with meaning.

The comparative analysis between both artists shows that while Onkala's lines evoke spontaneity and organic motion, Mustapha's lines emphasise precision, rhythm, and conceptual balance. This stylistic divergence reflects their individual artistic voices but also points to the broader diversity and richness within contemporary Nigerian drawing practice. Furthermore, the study found that both artists use line as a visual language capable of transcending mere form, engaging viewers in both aesthetic appreciation and critical interpretation. Their works illustrate how line, when deployed with intentionality, can become a powerful medium for conveying personal, environmental, and cultural narratives.

This study has demonstrated that line serves as both a formal and conceptual language in the drawings of Talatu Onkala and Nadama Mustapha. Through detailed formal and contextual analysis, the research has established that both artists approach line not just as a design element but as a vehicle for storytelling, emotional expression, and socio-cultural engagement. Talatu Onkala's exploration of organic line structures draws inspiration from her environmental surroundings and natural phenomena, resulting in drawings that feel fluid, spontaneous, and deeply connected to nature. Conversely, Nadama Mustapha's controlled and methodical use of line reflects cultural symbolism, floral aesthetics, and narrative precision, showcasing a style that is both intellectually engaging. By situating both artists within the larger discourse of contemporary Nigerian art, the study contributes to existing scholarship on stylistic variation, formal analysis, and contextual interpretation in drawing practice. It also highlights the importance of line as a universal visual language that is open to diverse interpretations based on personal, cultural, and environmental factors. Ultimately, the research underscores the need for further academic documentation and analysis of linear practice in Nigerian contemporary art, especially as younger and emerging artists continue to explore the expressive potentials of line within their visual narratives.

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