

**Maiduguri Journal of Arts and Design
(MAIDJAD)**

**Departments of Fine Arts and Industrial Design
Faculty of Environmental Studies,
University of Maiduguri
P.M.B 1069
Borno State, Nigeria
www.maidjad.com**

**ISSN: 2636-445X
Volume XI**

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**March/April 2026
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**Printed by: KABOD LIMITED, NL 7 LOKOJA ROAD, KADUNA, KADUNA STATE
Tel No: +2348029670000
www.kabodlimited.com
info@kabodlimited.com**

**Cover Design: Yusuf Mahdi Mele
Tel No: 07085659493**

Cover Art: Endangered Species II/Oil and Acrylic on canvas/4 6 x 6 ft/ 2023

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**Vol XI
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MAIDJAD

Maiduguri Journal of Arts and Design is a refereed journal published biannually. **MAIDJAD** was founded in early 2016 in order to provide a suitable academic platform for the discussion of contemporary theories, research and practice-based activities that are broadly related to arts and design.

Our esteemed referees review each article submitted to evaluate the quality of research and relevance to the development of academia, and for accessibility of such a paper to local and international audiences.

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adiwutalatuonkala@unimaid.edu.ng

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Department of Industrial Design, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
University of Maiduguri, Borno State.
psale2002@yahoo.com

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Department of Industrial Design, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
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ashiedup@yahoo.com

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Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
University of Maiduguri, Borno State.
ggyegwe@yahoo.com

Dr Agaku Saghevua Amos

Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Maiduguri,
Borno State.
amosagaku@gmail.com

Dr. Ifeanyiukwu Asogwa

Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
University of Maiduguri,
Borno State.
ifeanyiukwuasogwa@gmail.com

Dr. Hamsatu Saleh

Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
University of Maiduguri, Borno State.
mshelbila2@gmail.com

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Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Environmental Studies,
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zshallangwa@unimaid.edu.ng

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MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Submissions should be typed double-spaced, fully justified, in Times New Roman with 12 Font size on A4 paper as a Microsoft document.

ABSTRACT AND KEY WORDS

All submitted papers should include an abstract of not more than 200 words and should be accompanied by five keywords to be placed immediately after the abstract section.

AUTHOR (S) IDENTIFICATION

A separate sheet indicating the title of the paper, as well as the following information about the author (s), should accompany each submission: i. Full name; ii. Institutional affiliation; iii. **Active** Email address; iv. **Active** Phone number; v. Current status, e.g. Professor, Dr., Senior Lecturer, etc.

SUBMISSION

All contributions are to be submitted as email attachments to maidjad2016@gmail.com and maidugurijournalofartsanddesign@gmail.com. The journal secretary will write to all contributors within three days to acknowledge receipt of submissions. Articles will be given to professional assessors in the appropriate areas; thereafter, they will be sent back to contributors for corrections.

REFERENCE STYLE

MIADJAD has since its Maiden Edition adopted the documentation style of the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th Edition and therefore, expects all contributors to rigorously format their references using the APA style.

Foreword

MAIDJAD Volume XI brings together two scholarly contributions that reaffirm the journal's commitment to rigorous inquiry in African art and visual culture, while foregrounding the continued relevance of theory, history, and close visual reading in contemporary art scholarship.

The first article, "*A Comparative Formal and Contextual Analysis of Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu's Selected Drawings*," offers a structured examination of drawing as both aesthetic form and socio-cultural narration. The study positions line as more than a compositional device, arguing for its function as a vehicle of meaning-making across political history, cultural memory, gendered experience, and diasporic identity. By placing Obiora and Ada Udechukwu side by side, the paper advances an important comparative lens that highlights both convergence and distinction within their visual languages, while also extending current scholarship on the Nsukka School and indigenous sign systems.

The second article, "*Rethinking Linearity of Forms and Nigerian Perspective: A Discourse on Theories and Concepts of Modernism in Painting*," takes up a broader theoretical engagement with modernism, debating trajectories and resonances within African and Nigerian art discourse. Anchored in questions of influence, visual language, and the conceptual role of line, the paper invites readers to consider how modernist ideas are interpreted, contested, and re-situated through African artistic practice and art education, particularly through discussion of selected Nigerian artists and institutional histories.

Together, the articles in this volume offer readers both depth and range: from focused comparative analysis grounded in artworks and context, to wider theoretical reflection on modernism and its claims within African art history. MAIDJAD remains grateful to the authors for their contributions, and to the reviewers and editorial team whose careful labour sustains the journal's scholarly standards.

We invite continued submissions that advance critical debates, introduce fresh evidence, and expand interpretive frameworks for African art and design across historical and contemporary contexts.

Adiwu Talatu Onkala PhD

Editor

Maiduguri Journal of Arts and Design (MAIDJAD)

March/April 2026

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Prof. Rasaq Olatunde Rom Kalilu, Ph.D

V.C, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology,
Ogbomoso.

romkalilu@lautech.edu.ng

Onyeagoro Johnson Chima

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Adeyemi Federal University of Education,
Ondo, Nigeria.

Chimajohnson2019@gmail.com

Emmanuel Irokanulo, PhD¹, & Mokayi Olusegun²

^{1&2}Department of Fine Arts,
Yaba College of Technology, Yaba.

<https://orcid.org/10000-0002-0253-0932> ^b

³Paul Sonayon, Seyi GBANGBAYAU

Department of Fine Arts,
University of Technology, Ilaro, Ogun State

A COMPARATIVE FORMAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF OBIORA UDECHUKWU AND ADA UDECHUKWU'S SELECTED DRAWINGS.

Prof. Rasaq Olatunde Rom Kalilu, Ph.D

V.C, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso.

romkalilu@lautech.edu.ng

Onyeagoro Johnson Chima (Senior Lecturer).

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,

Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

Chimajohnson2019@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper critically examines the intersection of art and society by analysing selected drawings of Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu, a renowned Nigerian artist couple. Using a conceptual framework rooted in Formalism, Semiotics, Feminist and Contextual Art Theories, the study highlights how both artists deploy line not only as a compositional element but also as a vehicle for social commentary. Obiora's drawings explore themes of collective history, political struggle, and cultural identity, while Ada's work focuses on personal narratives, gender issues, and diasporic identity. Through a comparative formal and contextual analysis, the study reveals how their works, though stylistically distinct, complement each other in their shared commitment to visual storytelling within the socio-cultural landscape.

Keywords: Art and Society, Obiora Udechukwu, Ada Udechukwu, Cultural Identity, Nsukka Art School, Gender, African art

Introduction

Art serves not only as an aesthetic representation but also as a lens through which cultural identity, political struggle, gender narratives, and social commentary are visualised and contested. Within this context, the works of Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu present a compelling case of how two artists from the same cultural and academic background employ drawing, especially the language of line, as a means of engaging with different aspects of society. This study examines selected works of Nigerian artists Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu, an artist couple whose individual and collaborative experiences have significantly shaped the development of contemporary African art. As members of the Nsukka School and life partners, their works represent two distinct yet interconnected approaches to line and social engagement.

While Obiora's drawings reflect collective social and political experiences rooted in historical events like the Nigerian Civil War, Ada's drawings delve into personal, domestic, and gendered experiences, often framed within her identity as a woman and as part of the Nigerian diaspora. This paper analyses how both artists use line not just for structural composition but also as a vehicle for socio-cultural narratives. Examining their work as a couple offers deeper insight into how personal relationships, gender dynamics, and shared cultural influences shape artistic production.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this research is to investigate how Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu utilise line in their drawings as a means of engaging with social realities. The study seeks to understand how each artist, through distinct visual languages, addresses issues of identity, memory, gender, and socio-political history.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Analyse the formal qualities of line in selected drawings by both artists, exploring how line functions both as an aesthetic device and a narrative tool.
2. Examine the cultural and political contexts that inform their artistic choices, particularly how indigenous sign systems such as *Uli* and *Nsibidi* are integrated into their works.

3. Conduct a comparative analysis of both artists' approaches, considering how Obiora's drawings contrast with Ada's more introspective and gender-focused pieces.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on selected ink drawings by Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu. The selection covers works produced between the late 1960s and 2021: in the periodisation of Nigerian art, this era spans from after the Nigerian modern art age to the present day, with a focus on cultural identity, social commentary, and activism. The research primarily examines how line is employed as a formal and narrative device within Nigerian socio-political, cultural, and gender contexts.

Justification of the Study

The justification of this study lies in the need to critically examine how artistic practices, especially drawing, serve as a medium for negotiating socio-political, gendered, and cultural identities within the context of African society. While there is considerable literature on the Nsukka School, much of the existing scholarship tends to focus on either Obiora Udechukwu or Ada Udechukwu in isolation. Scholars often focus on Ada Udechukwu's distinct style. In contrast, Obiora's art is frequently examined for its socio-political undertones, and Ada's work is typically approached through the lens of feminist and diasporic themes (Ottenberg, 2022; Smithsonian Institution, 1997).

There has been limited scholarly attention paid to their intersecting practice as a couple, whose shared artistic, academic, and domestic spaces at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, shaped their stylistic development and thematic concerns. Understanding their parallel yet distinct approaches, as is intended in this paper, offers fresh insights into how artistic dialogues within intimate partnerships influence the development of individual artistic voices.

Moreover, exploring how both artists employ line as a tool for the development of both form and content broadens current understandings of African drawing traditions. It demonstrates the evolving role of line as both an aesthetic and socio-cultural narrative tool. Given contemporary interest in African modernisms, feminist art practices, and postcolonial visualities, this study contributes to filling a critical gap in African art history scholarship, especially concerning gender dynamics, artistic hybridity, and the integration of indigenous aesthetics with contemporary concerns.

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on a multi-dimensional conceptual framework that combines Formalism, Semiotics, Feminist and Contextual Art theories to guide the interpretation of the drawings of Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu.

Formalism serves as a foundational lens, focusing on the visual elements within the artists' works, particularly the use of line. Through this perspective, attention is given to aesthetic qualities such as line direction, thickness, rhythm, texture, and spatial relationships. This approach facilitates a close reading of how both artists manipulate line as a core visual tool in their drawings.

In the context of semiotics, the works of Rowland Barthes (1977) offer a framework for interpreting the signs and symbols embedded within the artists' linear compositions. Both Obiora and Ada integrate indigenous visual systems such as *Uli* and *Nsibidi*, which are culturally loaded symbols that convey deeper meanings beyond their formal appearances. Semiotic analysis allows this study to decode these symbols and uncover the layers of meaning they contribute to the visual narrative.

Feminist Art Theory is employed, particularly in analysing Ada Udechukwu's work. Her drawings reflect personal and gendered experiences, and this framework facilitates the interpretation of how she negotiates issues of femininity, identity, and domesticity within the socio-cultural and diasporic contexts of Nigerian society. Scholars like Linda Nochlin (1971) and Griselda Pollock (1988) provide

the theoretical grounding to examine how Ada challenges traditional narratives and asserts a female voice in African art discourse.

Contextual Art Theory, as postulated by Sullivan (2005), provides the foundation for understanding how both artists respond to their socio-political, historical, and cultural environments. Obiora's works, for example, are heavily influenced by Nigeria's political history, particularly the Nigerian Civil War, while Ada's drawings reflect themes of displacement, diaspora, and female subjectivity. Contextual analysis allows the study to situate each artist's work within the broader historical, social, and political realities that shaped their artistic expression. By integrating these four interrelated theoretical perspectives, the study achieves a balanced and comprehensive understanding of how Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu, as a couple and as individual artists, use line both as an aesthetic form and as a medium for social, political, and gendered commentary in contemporary African art.

Literature Review

Several scholars have examined the role of line in African art. Arnheim (1974) and Ocvirk *et al.* (2012) discuss the psychological and perceptual impact of line, while in the Nigerian context, Kalilu (2006) and Kalilu and Woods (2014) focus on its narrative and cultural functions within Nigerian art. Ottenberg (1997, 2002) provides a detailed analysis of Obiora's work, highlighting his use of *Uli* and *Nsibidi* forms to address Nigerian socio-political realities. Ada Udechukwu's contribution has been discussed in feminist art discourse and exhibitions such as the Poetics of Line (Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, 1977), which positioned her within the larger Nsukka School. Art Africa Magazine (2021) has also highlighted Ada's identity, displacement, and femininity.

It is good to reemphasise the fact that Ada Udechukwu's works are seemingly less studied than those of Obiora Udechukwu's art, which is due to several factors such as: Obiora's prolific output and recognition, academic and artistic impact, institutional representation and artistic movement (Nneka & George, 2023). Nonetheless, Ada's works have been explored from feminist and diasporic perspectives in *The Poetics of Line* (1997) and in contemporary reviews (Art Africa, 2021; ThisDay Live, 2021). Scholars such as Okeke-Agulu (2006) and Sullivan (2005) further discuss how both artists, through shared cultural traditions and personal experiences, have contributed to redefining the language of drawing in Africa.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive research design, collecting data through primary data collection methods, such as artists' writings and statements, and artworks. Additionally, secondary data was gathered via literature reviews, archival research, exhibition reviews and critique. Other data collection methods include observations, photographic and video documentation and oral histories. Formal visual analysis was conducted to examine the aesthetic qualities of line-direction, weight, rhythm, and texture in the selected drawings. Semiotic analysis was used to interpret the indigenous symbols and motifs embedded within the artworks, focusing on how they communicate cultural and political messages. Additionally, Feminist Art Theory was applied to Ada's drawings to unpack gendered narratives and identity politics. Contextual analysis also played a crucial role, examining how historical events, especially the Nigerian Civil War and postcolonial politics, influenced Obiora's work. At the same time, themes of diaspora and femininity informed Ada's artistic output. The comparative nature of the study involved cross-analysing both artists' works to highlight similarities and differences in their treatment of line as both form and content.

Works of Obiora Udechukwu:

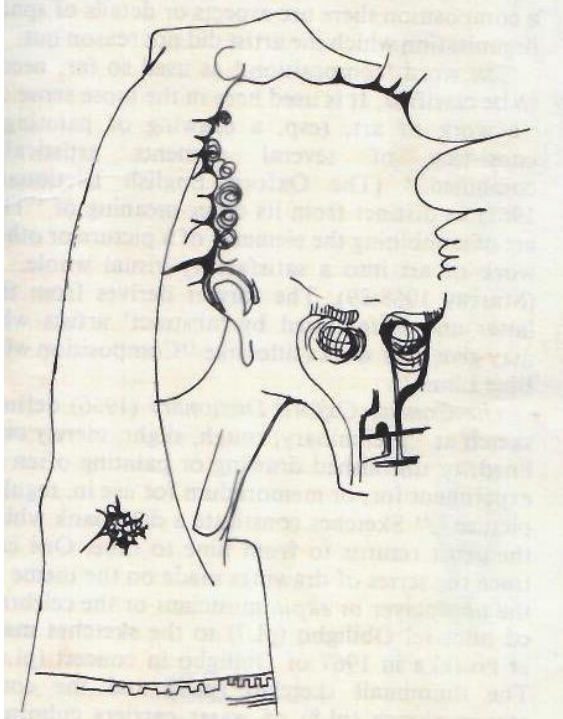


Plate 1. Title: *Refugee (Older woman)*. Artist: Obiora Udechukwu. Size: 20.3 x 12.6cm, Year 1970. Medium: Pen and Ink on paper.



Plate 2. Title: *The Preacher*. Artist: Obiora Udechukwu. Size: 38.6cm x 27.9cm. Year: 1976. Medium: Pen and Ink on paper.



Plate 3. Title: *Dancer*. Artist: Obiora Udechukwu. Size: 22.8 x 16.7cm, Year 1973:
Medium: Pen and Ink on paper.

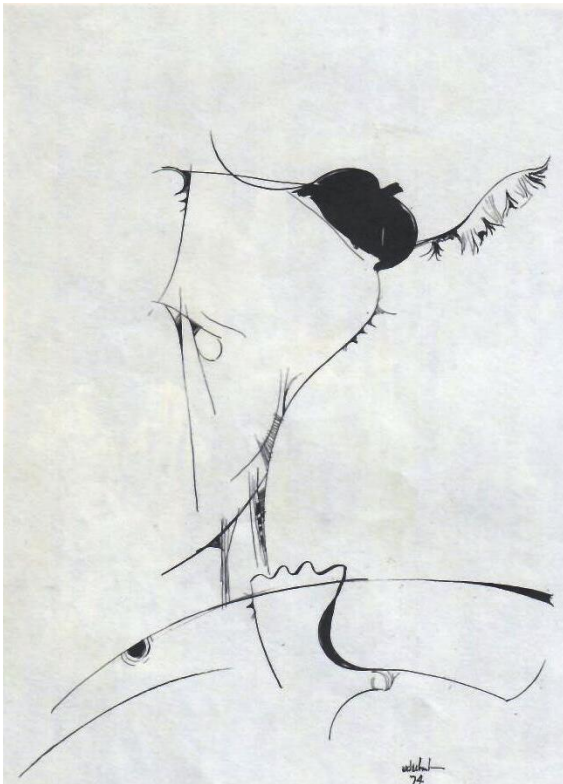


Plate 4: Title: *Titled Man with Elephant Horn*: Artist: Obiora Udechukwu: Size: 25.3 x 17.8cm,
Year 1974:Medium: Pen and ink on paper.



Plate 5. Title: *No Water*. Artist: Obiora Udechukwu. Size: 17.5 x 21cm, 67/8' x 81/4', Year 1980. Medium: pen and Ink on paper.

Formal Analysis of Works

Obiora Udechukwu's works are characterised by alternating bold, thick, thin, curved, and dynamic lines that convey emotion, tension, and urgency. *Refugee (Old Woman)* (Plate 1) depicts an abstract form resembling an elderly figure whose gender remains ambiguous unless guided by the title. Through varied line thickness, Obiora suggests both the frailty and desperation of the subject. Minimal yet profound motifs and symbolic patterns draw attention to the facial features of the eyes, nose, and mouth, which express the emotional weight of the figure's condition. *The Preacher* (Plate 2) extends this dynamic use of line but incorporates vigorous, broad brushstrokes of black to emphasise passion and conviction. The exaggerated size of the figure in relation to the podium suggests the supremacy of the message over its messenger and surroundings. Though filled with energy, the work remains restrained in form, relying on line direction and thickness to communicate urgency.

In contrast, *Dancer* (Plate 3) demonstrates a more frantic and multiple use of rigid, abrupt lines. While the earlier works are minimalistic and sparing, here Obiora recreates intensity and rhythm through sharp, stiff strokes that nonetheless convey fluid movement. Suspended mid-air with limbs flung at awkward angles, the figure is animated by concentrated lines in the upper body, celebrating complexity and detail rather than restraint.

Titled Man with Elephant Horn (Plate 4) marks a return to sparseness, with strategic placement of deep noirs. The blackened cap, hand, and tusk direct focus to the central symbols of prestige and cultural identity. Vertical and curved lines reinforce the dignity of the figure, showing Obiora's mastery of line as a communicative tool, minimal yet laden with meaning.

In *No Water* (Plate 5), Obiora deploys heavy, rhythmic circular lines of varying thickness to depict suffering bodies. The continuous nature of the strokes evokes the unending hardships of the masses, while the interplay between human figures and water containers suggests a stark relationship of dependence and scarcity. Across the oeuvre, Obiora also integrates *Uli* and *Nsibidi* symbols, blending curvilinear and geometric forms that ground his practice in indigenous aesthetics while engaging contemporary political realities.

Contextual Analysis

Obiora Udechukwu's works are deeply rooted in Nigeria's political history, cultural heritage, and the everyday struggles of the masses in Southeastern Nigeria. His drawings serve as aesthetic expressions and visual documentations that capture the social realities of marginalised communities while offering incisive critiques of the ruling class. They expose contradictions within governance and the quality of life lived by the masses, as well as highlight the resilience within the people, and foreground how his art is a medium for social commentary.

For instance, *No Water* (Plate 5) illustrates the frustration of citizens forced to endure long queues at public water points, with interwoven, continuous lines reflecting both the physical strain and the seemingly endless cycle of deprivation. In *The Preacher* (Plate 2), Udechukwu turn attention to religion, portraying it as both a refuge and a coping mechanism for the masses, whose unmet needs drive them toward spiritual consolation but also expose them to another form of exploitation. By contrast, *Titled Man With Elephant Horn* (Plate 4) embodies prestige and authority: the figure's proud stance and sparse yet bold visual markers subtly evoke the aloofness of political elites, whose disconnection from the lived realities of their citizens undermines their ability to relate meaningfully and make decisions that address the well-being of society at large.

Udechukwu's use of *Nsibidi* and *Uli* visual traditions is central to his ability to embed layered meanings in his work. *Nsibidi*, an ideographic script associated with communication, secrecy, and social order in precolonial Southeastern Nigeria, lends Obiora's drawings a symbolic vocabulary that transcends literal representation. The seeming secrecy of the implied meanings in his works requires an adept viewer to decode and, thus, perhaps as indirectly intended, absolves the artist himself from persecution. Inclusively, *Uli*, historically used in Igbo body and wall painting, provides him with an economy of form, a minimalistic repertoire of curvilinear, geometric, and often simplistic symbols that enrich his linework with rhythm and cultural resonance. These traditions allow his works to oscillate between abstraction and legibility, embedding indigenous aesthetics within critiques of contemporary, political and social realities.

Ultimately, Udechukwu situates his practice within both the immediacy of Nigerian sociopolitical struggles and the continuity of Igbo visual heritage. His integration of *Nsibidi* and *Uli* ensures that the works are not merely formal exercises in line and symbol but layered texts that engage history, culture, politics, and communal memory simultaneously, yet still leave room for global application and referencing.

Works of Ada Udechukwu:

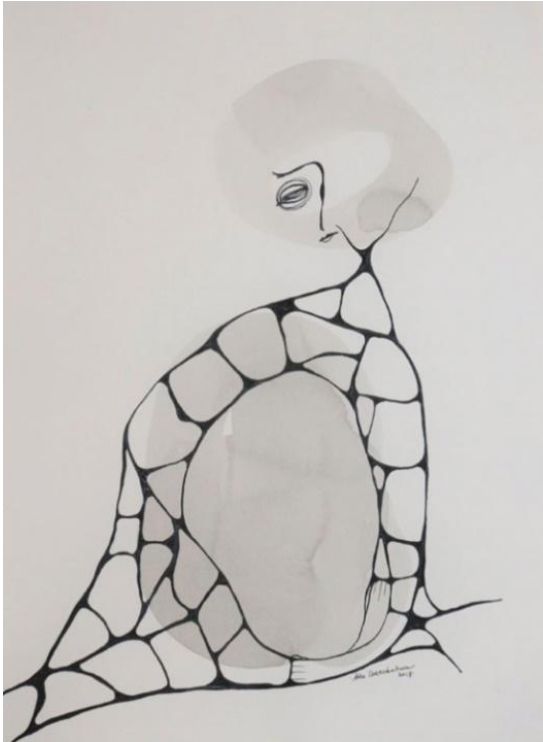


Plate 6. Title: Solitude; Artist: Ada Udechukwu. Size: 36 x 26cm, Year 2018. Medium: pen and ink.



Plate 7. Title: No Way Out; Artist: Ada Udechukwu. Size: 51 x 35.5cm, Year 2020. Medium: pen and ink



Plate 8. Title: *What is Carried*; Artist: Ada Udechukwu. Size: 41 x 31cm: Year 2018: Medium: Ink on Paper



Plate 9. Title: *How Fragile This Containment*; Artist: Ada Udechukwu. Size: 31.5x 23 cm; Year 2018: Medium: Ink on Paper.

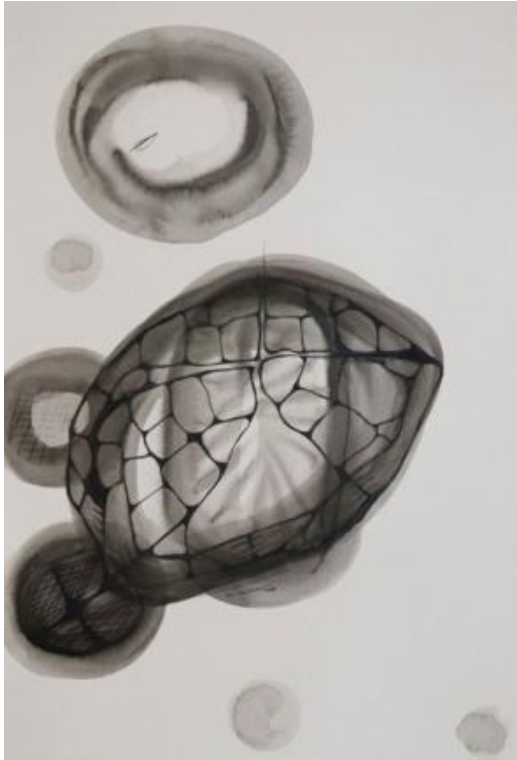


Plate 10: Title: *What is Born Within*; Artist: Ada Udechukwu: Size: 51 x 36cm:
Year 2020:Medium: Ink on Paper

Formal Analysis of Works

Formally, Ada Udechukwu's line is her primary expressive tool. In her works, the lines meander, loop, and dissolve into each other, forming a visual pattern that evokes a sense of physical and emotional movement. Her exploration of continuous, flowing lines brings to mind traditional *Uli* drawings, which she extends into a contemporary idiom of personal reflection. The images in these drawings, which are always ethereal, exquisite and semi-abstract, appear suspended in space, which emphasises a fluid negotiation between form and void. This open composition suggests impermanence, a metaphor for life in flux. In *How Fragile This Containment* (Plate 9), Ada Udechukwu achieves an extraordinary balance between fragility and structure. The faint translucent washes of ink under the fine ink lines evoke a sense of tension between what is held and what might dissolve. The drawn forms, enclosed yet porous, symbolise the delicate boundaries of human experience. In addition, *What is Carried* (Plate 8) expands her exploration of line through compositional layering.

Within this composition are the interlacing lines from shapes reminiscent of figures or vessels, subtly referencing burden, memory, and the unseen weight of existence. The tonal restraint, which is limited to grey, emphasises the meditative quality of the artwork: the rhythmic repetition of forms and the subtle modulation of space create a quiet tension, as if the artwork itself breathes. Besides, in the drawing of *No Way Out* (Plate 7), the lines converge and tighten, producing a more claustrophobic spatial arrangement. The once-fluid gestures of motion appear constrained, as though trapped within the compositional field. This visual compression contrasts with the openness of *Solitude* (Plate 6), which suggests a psychological turning point, from motion to stillness, from freedom to introspection.

Through this, Ada Udechukwu demonstrates her ability to translate inner emotional states into formal structures by the use of dynamics of line and space as expressive metaphors. All these works display the interplay of linear delicacy, spatial rhythm, and restrained ink wash, exhibiting Ada Udechukwu's commitment to lyrical minimalism, which is a hallmark of her artistic voice. More so,

where the washes suggest the figure as a solid, whole unit, the web structure seems like a falling carapace, a cracked pot. On their own, or combined, these two elements convey an image of a subject riven by the antagonistic interaction of its own constitutive aspects. The washes are not strong enough to fully define the subject; the linear structures are too skeletal to give it a bodied presence. This is a figure in crisis, or rather a figuration of existential crisis. In this sequence of drawings, the fusion of image and idea, form, and concept, produced a unique linear clarity and brevity of Ada Udechukwu.

Ada Udechukwu's line works are delicate, fragmented, and together form a cohesive body of introspective visual inquiry. Formally, they (Plates 6-10) exhibit masterful control of line, tone, and spatial rhythm, transforming drawing into a lyrical expression of motion and stillness. Her ink and watercolour compositions use fine linear strokes, empty spaces, and fluid motion to evoke a sense of emotional narratives of femininity, identity, and belonging. Her earlier experience in textile design also manifests in her intricate linear textures. Her systems of drawing figures, consisting of soft washes that serve as figural armature, and the black, *isi-nwaoji* structure that gives perceptual volume to and partially delineate the figure, characterizes Ada Udechukwu's works on review such as *How Fragile this Containment* (Plate 9), *What is Borne Within* (Plate 10), *What is Carried* (Plate 8) and *Solitude* (Plate 6): gave these drawings a decorative structure through an iterative process of patient and deliberate mark making. The fluid interplay of lines and spaces can be interpreted through the lens of Igbo cosmology, where life and matter are considered interconnected manifestations of divine energy. In this way, her drawings become a reflection of personal and cultural identity.

Contextual Analysis

Ada's drawings are grounded in personal experiences, addressing motherhood, feminine identity, and the emotional landscape of migration. Her minimalist use of line reflects her diasporic consciousness and her position as one of the few female voices in the Nsukka School. Her works are built on Uche Okeke's philosophy of Natural Synthesis, integrating traditional Igbo visual forms or Uli motifs with modern artistic expression, but redefine it through a unique personal and gendered sensibility. Ada Udechukwu's choice of subject matter for her drawings, which is usually poetic and introspective, reveals her dual identity as an artist and writer. These textual cues operate as conceptual frameworks that deepen the interpretive space of her drawings. For instance, *What is Borne Within* (Plate 10) and *What is Carried* (Plate 8) evoke themes of emotional burden, memory, and the invisible labour of womanhood. The minimalist formalism of the drawings thus conceals profound psychological and existential reflections, particularly concerning female interiority and the politics of containment and expression.

In *Solitude* (Plate 6), Ada Udechukwu visualises isolation not as emptiness but as self-awareness. The sparse linear composition and open spatial arrangement mirror the experience of quiet introspection and meditative calm. Conversely, *No Way Out* (Plate 7) transforms *Solitude* (Plate 6) into confinement; the interlocking lines that are dense evoke feelings of entrapment, echoing the struggles of women who are negotiating autonomy within restrictive social and cultural boundaries, additionally, in *How Fragile This Containment* (Plate 9), appears to be a commentary on emotional resilience—the tenuous balance between self-control and vulnerability. The drawing's fragile contours and translucent layers resonate with broader feminist concerns about the body as both vessel and site of containment. Through such symbolism, Ada offers a subtle feminist critique, employing abstraction rather than overt representation to articulate women's emotional landscape.

Ada Udechukwu finally applied a formal language that conveys, with persuasive efficacy, her longstanding meditation on the human condition, specifically subjects trapped or lost in the crossroads of life. The two elements with which she constructs her figures, the soft ink washes such as *No Way Out* (Plate 7) and *What is Borne Within* (Plate 10) and the rigid *isi-nwaoji* structure (Plates 6-9) dramatises a tension between the weak integrative forces of the former, and the strong

dispersive character of the latter. Where the washes suggest the figure as a solid, whole unit, the web structure seems like a falling carapace, a cracked pot. On their own, or combined, these two elements convey an image of a subject riven by the antagonistic interaction of its own constitutive aspects. The washes are not strong enough to fully define the subject; the linear structures are too skeletal to give it a bodied presence. This is a figure in crisis, or rather a figuration of existential crisis. In this sequence of drawings, the fusion of image and idea, form, and concept, produced a unique linear clarity and brevity.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative visual analysis of Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu's drawings reveals a convergence and divergence in their artistic journeys. Though strong individuals in their own standing, it appears that as a couple, they both draw inspiration from their indigenous cultural backgrounds as well as from Uli and Nsibidi symbols, signs and aesthetics, yet their thematic concerns, stylistic inflexions, and techniques differ in profound visual, thematic and philosophical ways. Obiora Udechukwu's work gravitates towards an adoption of public and political ideas, employing dense, layered lines, strategic black contours, and occasional washes of broad strokes to visualise the collective struggles of citizens. His drawings externalise the social condition, embedding linear density with figurative aggression that critiques the disconnect between the ruling class and ordinary citizens. Subtle yet uncompromising, Obiora Udechukwu transforms line into a quiet language protest, encoding layered political commentary that demands attentiveness from the viewer. His understated sharpness reflects both mastery of draftsmanship and an acute awareness of his socio-political environment.

Ada Udechukwu, in contrast, engages with the personal and the intimate, employing minimalist yet deliberate lines to navigate emotional landscapes, gendered experiences, and diasporic subjectivities. Her use of strong, bold strokes alongside faint, singular marks constructs forms that oscillate between fragility and weight. While Obiora Udechukwu's abstractions delineate the human form with precision, Ada Udechukwu's strokes often imply rather than assert corporeality, privileging the internal condition over the external figure. This distinction suggests a dichotomy of focus: Obiora Udechukwu foregrounds the human figure as shaped by societal pressures, while Ada Udechukwu foregrounds the lived experience and inner life of the individual.

What unites their practices is the centrality of community as both subject and anchor, and the line as a primary tool of expression. Their shared artistic environment at Nsukka facilitated dialogue and exchange, yet enabled each to cultivate a distinct visual voice. Together, their drawings embody a dynamic duality within Nigerian contemporary art, a balance of the political and the personal, the masculine and the feminine, the collective and the individual.

Examining their works side by side reveals both convergence and divergence. As a couple, both artists draw from the same cultural sources, particularly Uli, but their thematic concerns and stylistic choices differ significantly. Obiora adopts a public, political lens, using dense, layered lines to address collective societal struggles. His works often represent external, societal conditions, using linear density and figurative aggression. Ada, by contrast, engages with the personal and private, utilising minimalist, gentle lines to explore interior emotional spaces, gender roles, and diasporic identity.

Their shared artistic environment as a couple at Nsukka provided a platform for dialogue, yet allowed each to develop a distinct visual language. Together, their works represent a dynamic duality within Nigerian contemporary art—a balance of the political and the personal, the masculine and the feminine.

Findings

The study reveals that the two artists (Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu) share a common creative foundation rooted in the *Uli* aesthetic tradition. However, their drawings profoundly articulate different perspectives on human experience, identity, and artistic purpose.

The findings show that Obiora Udechukwu's compositions are known for expressive density, social engagement, and rhythmic line. In *No Water* (Plate 5), *Refugee (Old Woman)* (Plate 1), and *The Preacher* (Plate 2), the artist employed vigorous line structures and images that are symbolic to document social realities and moral contradictions in postcolonial Nigeria. His linear drawings are pulsating with strength and emotion, evoking collective struggle and endurance. The *No Water* artwork (Plate 5) illustrates scarcity and neglect as a metaphor for failed governance; the image in *Refugee (Old Woman)* (Plate 1) portrays an emphatic depiction of suffering and perseverance as a result of displacement. Similarly, in the artworks, *Titled Man with Elephant Horn* (Plate 4) and *Dancer* (Plate 3) feature the dualities of culture, authority, and celebration within the sociocultural landscape of Southeastern Nigeria. Through these, Obiora Udechukwu's drawings emerge as a visual testimony of conscience—a platform where social justice, ethical tension, and communal awareness converge.

In contrast, Ada Udechukwu's drawings investigate emotion, metaphysical transformation and interiority. Her artworks—*Solitude* (Plate 6); *No Way Out* (Plate 7); *What is Carried* (Plate 8); *How Fragile This Containment* (Plate 9) and *What is Borne Within* (Plate 10)—are differentiated by delicacy of line, quiet composition, and poetic symbolism. Instead of narrating social struggle, they visualise the psychological and spiritual dimensions of human existence from the feminine perspective. Her linear style, though equally rooted in *Uli* aesthetics, is softer and more contemplative. The artwork *What is Borne Within* (Plate 10) and the piece *How Fragile This Containment* (Plate 9) express emotional weight and vulnerability through restrained forms and muted tonalities. The image in *No Way Out* (Plate 7) reflects confinement and self-discovery in a minimalist visual language. Ada Udechukwu's artworks, therefore, function as visual meditations—introspective reflections on solitude, identity, and perseverance.

In symbolism and expression, both artists use metaphoric imagery to transcend literal representation, but their intentions differ: Obiora Udechukwu's symbols confront reality, while Ada Udechukwu's transmute it. Additionally, while Obiora Udechukwu's line acts as a weapon of protest and witness, Ada Udechukwu's line functions as a thread of thought and introspection. His linearity speaks; hers whispers.

Conclusion

From the findings, it is concluded that Obiora Udechukwu and Ada Udechukwu's drawings represent two intersecting yet distinct trajectories within the evolution of Nigerian modernism. Both artists use the language of line and form as instruments of thought, emotion, and identity, but their creative intentions diverge in subject, tone, and psychological focus.

Obiora Udechukwu's drawings reflect an activist consciousness, embedded in the belief that the artist is both witness and commentator. His artworks are a visual chronicle of Nigeria's sociopolitical realities, transforming ordinary experiences into symbolic reflections on justice, inequality, and resilience. His expressive linearity and symbolic density reaffirm the power of drawing as a moral and intellectual medium, one capable of engaging the collective conscience.

Ada Udechukwu's artwork, on the other hand, expresses a spiritual and emotional depth that transcends narrative realism. Her drawings evoke silence, fragility, and transcendence using linear subtlety to translate intangible feelings into visual form. Her themes of solitude/isolation, containment/entrapment, memory, and endurance invite meditative reflection on the human spirit, particularly the experiences of women navigating identity, emotion, and belonging. Through minimalism and poetic restraint, she redefines drawing as an act of inner seeing—a silent articulation of being.

Conclusively, the two artists embody the duality of external and internal realities within the Nsukka School's intellectual heritage. While Obiora gives voice to the social body, Ada gives form to the inner soul. Their joint contributions affirm that drawing, within Nigerian modernism, transcends technical

representation to become a philosophical and existential pursuit-a means of understanding both society and the self.

Together, Obiora and Ada Udechukwu demonstrate that art grounded in indigenous aesthetics can remain deeply contemporary, intellectually rigorous, and emotionally profound. Their works not only extend the legacy of *Uli* but also establish drawing as a universal language of moral reflection and spiritual renewal within the continuum of Nigerian and global visual art.

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RETHINKING LINEARITY OF FORMS AND NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE: A DISCOURSE ON THEORIES AND CONCEPTS OF MODERNISM IN PAINTING

Emmanuel Irokanulo, PhD¹, & Mokayi Olusegun²

^{1&2}Department of Fine Arts, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba.

https://orcid.org/10000-0002-0253-0932_b

³Paul Sonayon, Seyi GBANGBAYAU

Department of Fine Arts, University of Technology, Ilaro, Ogun State

Abstract

Clement Greenberg's Modernist theory influences contemporary visual arts in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. The dialectic discourse and its development are directly linked to reflective ideas in precolonial African art object or better known as ritual objects found in Africa environment, as seen in the works of early African pioneers such as Ben Enwonwu (1917—1994), Clara Etso Ugbodaga (1921—1996), Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakpeya, and others during the movement's formative period. These artists drew inspiration from local art objects and created modernity through the fusion that occurred as their ideas transformed. This paper reviews the process and debates its relevance in today's art discourse. This clearly situates the story of African modernism, as told through the works of two prominent artists, as a leading force in the contemporary narrative of its emergence.

Keywords: African modernism, Gani Odutokun, Duke Asidere, Ibrahim EL Sallahi and contemporary discourse.

Introduction

Some precolonial African artworks are foundational in inspiring modernism in the visual arts. An artefact from the Sudanese region has sparked important debates about modernism, including within Bamigboye's works. The master sculptor draws on ancestral Yoruba objects, creating an aesthetic dialogue that influences the development of African modernism. It was clearly assumed that these precolonial African religious objects were among the major encounters that sparked modernism in the twentieth century and ended centuries of illusionistic design in pictorial composition. In contemporary Nigerian art, modernism is explored through the blending of traditional philosophy with postcolonial aesthetic objects, as seen in Bamigboye's pieces and reflected in Gbenga Offor's fusion of Yoruba anthropological objects and compositional design in European classical painting. The artist is one of the trained eyes in contemporary art education at Yaba College of Technology. This analysis aims to deepen the understanding of Clement Greenberg's modernism theories and their relevance to African and Nigerian art, especially in certain Nigerian practices. Scholars also note that post-colonial Nigerian art, exemplified by Ben Enwonwu, exhibits significant modernist traits. The early 20th century marked the early modernist period, and this piece seeks to analyse its key features.

In early European modernist painting, linearity is more than just a visual device; it is a contemporary visual language that reflects a way of thinking through paint rather than merely craftsmanship in creating images. It embodies a philosophical concept that often blends the old and the new in reinterpretation or, at times, challenges the existing order of thought. Artists such as Piet Mondrian (1872—1944) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) simplified visual forms to their basic elements, utilising lines and geometric shapes to convey metaphysical or experiential ideas. Artworks are entities that occupy space and time, whether they relate to hybrid musical or visual forms, such as improvisation or precise structure, or whether they are extinct or revived through active artistic resonance. From this perspective, the modernist approach shifts away from the resemblance or imitation of form towards a deliberate, boundaryless mode of expression.

Even in improvisation, numerous factors contribute to their distinctive status as autonomous entities, not merely mimicking their appearance or empirical timing, but more importantly, demonstrating objective, often conventional patterns. As artworks are objects in their own right, they are defined by their specific laws of form and existence. In this view, art exists independently:

in drama, not merely the text but the performance; in music, not merely the score but the emotion and sound it evokes.

Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism, with its horizontal and vertical lines in primary colours, represents balance, order, and spiritual harmony, evolving from simple landscape sketches into the intricate restructuring of forms. His compositions evoke a contemplative process through disciplined simplicity. Likewise, Paul Klee (1879—1940) transformed the line into a playful, symbolic gesture, illustrating inner states and subconscious realms.

In modernism, the line often relinquishes its descriptive role and becomes an independent, rhythmic force, a reflection of thought, energy, or order.



Plate I: Artist: Piet Mondrian Year of production: 1912 Titled: The Grey Tree.
Medium: Oil on canvas, Source: Netherlands, Hague Gemeente museum

In 1908, Piet Mondrian became deeply engaged in the latest developments in the art world. Over the next ten years, he underwent a rapid evolution through various styles. He began to use pure, vibrant colours and expressive brushwork, drawing on pointillism and Fauvism, resulting in works reminiscent of Van Gogh's intensity and vividness.

One notable work, "Farm Near Duivendrecht," features strong lines that dominate the scene of a farmhouse at twilight. The diminishing light at the end of the day creates a vibrant orange halo around the interlocking branches of barren trees, emphasising the linear patterns they form. Mondrian frequently visited this farm near Duivendrecht, a small village near Amsterdam, and produced many paintings of the building and its surrounding trees.

This artwork showcases his keen attention to the nuances of light, shadow, and reflection. It also indicates the artist's growing interest in flattening forms and linear structures that would characterise his later, entirely abstract works. The main point from this development is a gradual shift from basic representational forms to more linear, abstract styles. It was widely believed that European encounters with African ritual objects influenced this development; however, it is difficult to accept that the influence originated in Africa, as European art concepts were evolving at the time, indicating change. The development of modern painting in Africa marks a significant shift in the continent's artistic history. Rather than merely diverging from indigenous traditions, it represents a

dialogue between African visual heritage and Western academic conventions introduced during the colonial era.

The African version of modernism is, of course, the revival of precolonial aesthetic objects, transformed into a quasi-European form and fused with African indigenous forms, as we witness in many Ben's works. This paper examines the location and timing of art historians' perceptions regarding the rise of modern painting in Africa. It underscores specific factors that influenced its early growth in Nigeria. Modernism in painting arose as a radical departure from traditional Western art conventions. Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it stressed innovation and abstraction. This paper explores how artists from a colonial background employ form, medium, and perception in art within the context of fine art education. The concept has gradually gained traction worldwide through various art forums, and the African perspective presents a compelling opportunity to reassess and redefine contemporary painting practices. This is especially relevant when considering modernists such as Gani Odutokun and Duke Asdiere, among numerous other notable artists.

Early Developments in Modern African Painting

Art historians generally attribute the origins of modern African painting to the early twentieth century, when colonial education systems introduced formal art instruction. The development of institutional art education in Ghana and Sudan is particularly significant in this process. Similarly, in Sudan, the known Khartoum, or Sudanese, School emerged in the 1930s, when artists such as Ibrahim El-Salahi began to blend Islamic calligraphy and African design principles with the spatial ideas of European modernism. The western art critic finds it difficult to recognise modernism as a universal visual language. They believe only Europeans have the capacity for modernism, its practice, and its theories. Despite its aesthetic potential, the Western critic refused to acknowledge Salahi. Despite these odd regional developments, these are among the earliest moments in art-historical literature in which African artists deliberately experimented with modern pictorial languages, both self-aware and institutionally supported. The Nigerian Context: Beginnings of Modern Painting

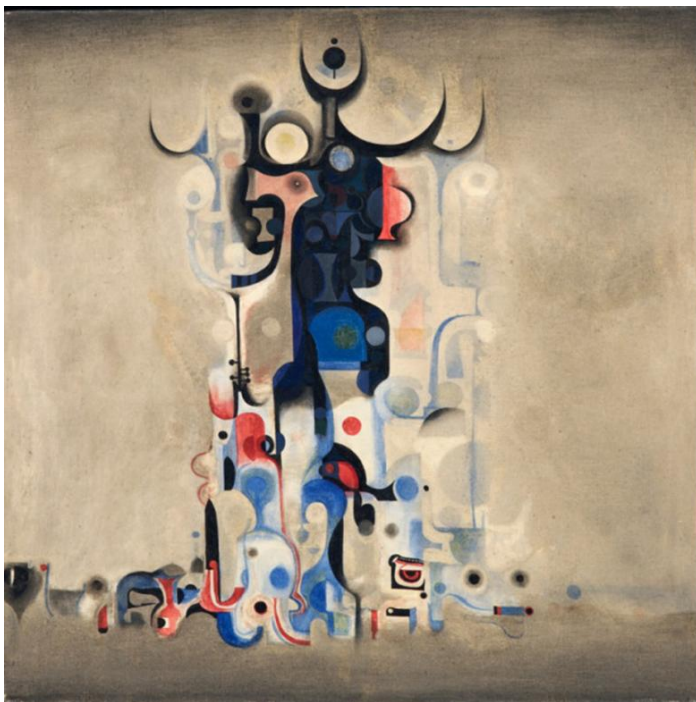


Plate II: Artist, Ibrahim EL Salahi: Titled: Vision of the Tomb Year: (1965)
Medium: Oil on Canvas

In the Nigerian context, the emergence of modern painting is typically dated to the early twentieth century, when Western academic systems of drawing and oil painting first took root in Lagos. Aina

Onobolu (1882–1963) is widely credited as the pioneer. Having studied at the Académie Julian in Paris, Onobolu returned to Lagos in 1909 and began teaching students to paint in oil and to draw using Western realist techniques. His works, including portraits of Lagos social elites, are regarded as the first examples of modern Nigerian painting.

Institutional support for modern art expanded considerably in the 1930s with the establishment of Yaba Higher College (later the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology). This was the first official tertiary institution in Nigeria to offer structured art education. By the late 1950s, Zaria Art School had emerged as a vital centre of experimentation, where a new generation of Nigerian artists, including Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, and Bruce Onobrakpeya, began to develop the idea of Natural Synthesis.

This concept encouraged the fusion of indigenous visual elements with modernist forms, becoming the philosophical foundation of modern Nigerian art. This concept seems to emerge from the philosophy of Negritude, which originated in Senegalese modernism. The origins of contemporary painting in Africa lie in the early twentieth-century introduction of Western art education and the subsequent reevaluation of indigenous visual heritage. Ghana and Sudan were among the first places where African artists began exploring modern art forms under institutional guidance. In Nigeria, modern painting originated in Lagos, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Aina Onobolu, and later developed within the academic environments of Yaba and Zaria. Rather than simply adopting foreign techniques, these artists engaged in a deliberate synthesis of styles, ultimately laying the foundation for the diverse and vibrant modernist traditions in contemporary African art.

The discussion of the modernist approach to creating tangible aesthetics, especially in painting, emphasises how linearity expressed through African perception and ideation in forms, as well as through the European concepts of lines, colour fields, and spatial relationships, serves as both a meditative tool and a conceptual anchor for modernist artists. The linear form emerged from a derivation of African forms in the early nineteenth century, marking a turning point in European art, shifting from pictorial to conceptual ideation and giving rise to nineteenth-century modernism. The idea of “meditating through linearity” suggests a contemplative engagement with visual elements in which form and meaning are intricately interwoven. Additionally, we will critically analyse Gani Odutokun's exploratory language in painting to understand the dialectics of phenomenology in fine arts and its representation of an idea of form. This inquiry seeks to illuminate the African concept of modernism within the aesthetic discourse among African and European-trained artists on the continent. To fully capture the African idea and spirit of modernity reflected in these artists' works, we must return to the origins of modernism and explore how certain Western ideologies have influenced their creations from an African perspective.

The awareness of modernism developed in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. For modernist artists, 'modern' often aims to capture the images and deep emotions of their age. Modernism goes beyond merely addressing contemporary issues; it involves a critical examination of the nature of art itself. This movement raises specific concerns about art and aesthetics inherent in the process of creating art, whether or not the artist depicts scenes from contemporary social life. Gani Odutokun and Duke Asidere, the main focus of this discourse, after a careful review of a solid background to modernist culture in painting, it is important to examine their contributions to the Nigerian perspective on modernism. Both are graduates of the renowned Zaria Art School, yet they represent different generations and philosophies.

Research focus

This writing seeks to thoroughly examine the history and significance of lines and colours in shaping form and space in twentieth-century modern Nigerian art, while framing modernist culture in painting from a Nigerian perspective, particularly among artists such as Gani Odutokun and Duke Asidere. In this context, the two artists discussed demonstrate how linearity plays an important role

in expressing their personal experiences on painting surfaces and within the discourse of modernism. Both artists are linked to the Zaria School of Art. For the authors of this essay, these artists offer a theoretical basis for a hypothesis concerning the second phase of the Zaria Art School.

The Objective of the Essay

This discourse will reevaluate the works of Gani Odutokun and Duke Asdiere, with a particular emphasis on the drawing and the influence of line and space in capturing the essence of the human figure in their selected drawings and paintings. Furthermore, the essay will examine the main themes of Gani's painting, including accident, design, and the painterly phenomena that characterise his works. These are the key features of discourse analysis.

Colour as Emotion and Abstraction

Modernist painters liberated colour from its purely descriptive role to one that is more expressive or suggestive. Gani Odutokun and his student Duke Asidere share similarities with the Fauves in their use of vibrant, non-naturalistic colours to emphasise emotional impact rather than visual accuracy. Colour became a direct reflection of feeling. Gani integrates design with painterly ideals in his artistic expression, while Asidere employs masquerade as a satirical critique of societal ills.

From a different perspective, figurative abstract expressionists like Duke Asidere elevate colour to almost a sacred status. His expansive, hazy colour fields create immersive and contemplative experiences. Asidere's paintings serve as visual meditations, designed to evoke profound emotional and spiritual responses to a world portrayed as a masquerade in which everyone plays a part, and no one is truly authentic. For Asidere, the only genuine elements in existence are his colours, lines, and the enigmatic illusion of the canvas.

Through these methods, the colour and lines employed in surface-as-space in modernist painting become a meditative tool, not merely something to be seen, but something to be felt. The artist uses rich colours to suggest empathy and to highlight the distortion of reality created by the pretenders represented in the masquerade of his paintings.



Plate III: Artist: Gani Odutokun, titled 'Dry earth'. Oil on Canvas, 1994, size: not supplied



Plate IV: Artist: Duke Asidere, Title: Untitled, Medium: Oil on canvas, Year: 2010, Source: Hourglass Gallery.

The colouring techniques employed by these two artists are distinct, and their use of lines highlights the messages they aim to communicate. Both artists approach painting and drawing from an abstract figurative perspective, critically engaging with the concept of precolonial African art. This engagement transforms the figure into a tool for philosophical expression, showcasing a new culture of pictorial uniqueness. The idea of linearity is one element borrowed from precolonial African art, as evidenced by Picasso's development of cubism. Linear lines and the utilisation of space are the two artists' main strengths in our discussion.

Space: From Illusion to Flatness

A critical shift in modernist painting is the redefinition of pictorial space. Traditionally, painters employed perspective to create an illusion of depth. Modernists rejected this, emphasising the flatness of the canvas and the autonomy of the painted surface. In this regard, both Gani Odutokun and his former student Duke Asidere employ a high perspective that expresses a linear experience of colour and space, opening a new way to reframe nature. The process of drawing and painting aligns with Paul Cézanne's destabilised single-point perspective by depicting multiple viewpoints. Cubists such as Picasso and Braque further fragmented space to convey the multiplicity of perception. Later, artists such as Barnett Newman embraced flatness, aligning with Clement Greenberg's formalist theories that advocated foregrounding painting's two-dimensional nature. This emphasis on flat space invites a different kind of meditation, not into illusion, but into the essence of the medium itself. Greenberg's theories became the basis for modernist and postmodernist visual culture and will underpin our critique of these artists. Modernism is a philosophy that is closely associated with new ideas and ways of thinking.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775—1854) viewed natural science as an ongoing exploration where each discovery prompts new questions, preventing full understanding. He believed art illustrates contrast through the interplay of two creative forces: the artist's conscious effort and the

unconscious genius behind the work. Thus, art lacks an external purpose; instead, its creation has an inherent purpose that we can only grasp intuitively, not intellectually. This concept is similar to Kant's idea of the purposiveness of the purposeless in living beings. An artwork influences viewers by showing that its true purpose lies in combining subjective and objective qualities that connect them. While Schelling highlights art's dominant role in his philosophy, it remains relevant to early twenty-first-century philosophy and aesthetics. His main inquiry is how to understand the unity of subject and object from the viewpoint of our limited, striving, and divided human nature.

Theoretical philosophy cannot fully explain how to overcome our sense of division, which manifests in art as an object of reason that appeals to the senses. This division, as a unified body of knowledge, is inherent in our need for incompleteness within the discourse of art as an alternative to scientific cognition; art, or the artist-philosopher, provides initiation into this understanding. Of course, previous philosophical discussions addressed such questions within dogmatic theology.

After examining the two major influences in Duke Asidere's art, especially his drawing, which is central to this discussion, one is encouraged to carefully chart his drawings and their creative core within aesthetic discourse. Criticism can be challenging to articulate, especially to someone outside the subjective perspective. Art knowledge differs from empirical reality; it is a subjective construct, whether or not it is grounded in empirical analysis, but it entails a deep understanding of the core phenomena that shape it. For those working within the quantitative realm, understanding the construction of knowledge involves constant variables and assumptions that lead to a comprehensive grasp; however, the experience of expertise in the visual arts differs from scientific theories. Irokanulo (2015) clearly states this perspective. Knowledge in art is highly subjective: for example, history can transform particular cultic objects into pieces of Fine Art, while some objects previously recognised as art may later be discredited as cultural artefacts. When attempting to articulate such knowledge, it must be from one's own perspective of observation.

Asidere's drawings establish a foundation for our understanding of the modernist approach to art: rather than copying the modernist, they recreate what they see anew from a new perspective, here drawing without employing illusion as a new form of knowledge in contemporary Nigerian art. We hope these drawings will clearly demonstrate the limitless power of art objects, much as modernism or the modernist approach, to which Greenberg belonged, is read. We believe his drawings reflect his cultural perception of the objects around him, blending the European classical art instruction he received at Zaria Art School. His technique continually explores lines, similar to those in his mentor Odutokun's drawings and paintings. There is no attempt to create illusions in his work; instead, he explores pure linear lines that embody the essence of being, as we interpret here.

The artist's articulation of form is fluid, meaning it does not possess any fixed intention beyond the feelings that perhaps enabled the artist at the time of encountering the emotion to create or re-create his observations in drawing. When one examines the drawing illustrated in Plate III below, it becomes evident that Asidere does not aim to produce an orderly composition; instead, the arrangement of the images appears randomly conceived on the surface, just as can be observed in Osaghae's understanding of the language of form and drawing.

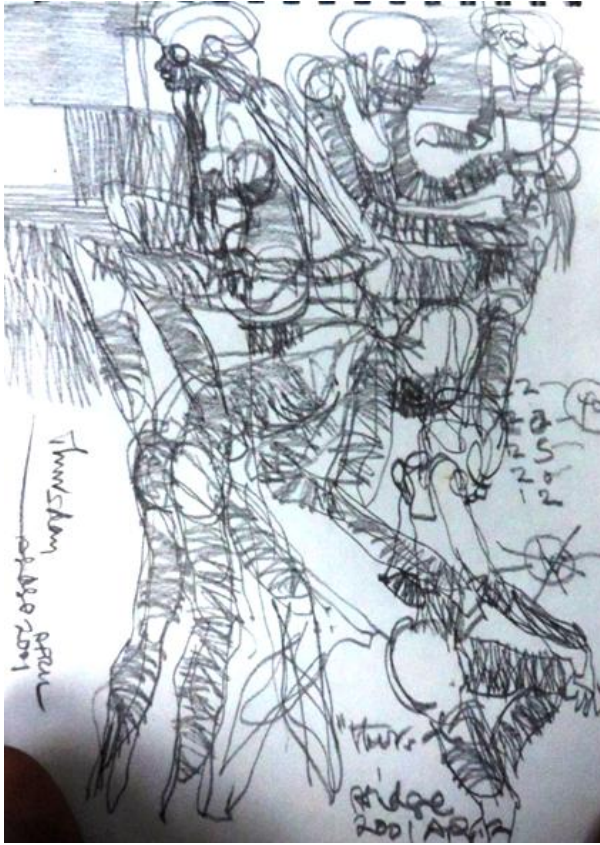


Plate V, *Untitled I*, Lead on Paper, 2015 (Source: The artist's sketch pad) Source: The Artist

The entire surface of his drawings is aesthetically aligned with lines, reflecting his perception of social disorder in the society we live in. The drawings (depicted in Plate I, above, and Plate II, below) constitute the artist's personal narrative of his understanding of life as experienced in busy city centres such as Lagos, where he resides and works. The drawings also adopt the theoretical stance of Heidegger's philosophy regarding the three temporalities of the universal rule, which are past, present, and future, united as the core of time.

Asidere's drawings are, of course, not necessarily a literal representation of Lagos, but rather a presentation of his subjective understanding of its reality through artistic interpretation. Asidere aims to express the inner reality that exists solely in his imagination. For instance, the image in Plate II demonstrates that the artist is more focused on imposing images than on creating a formal, organised composition. This style was also evident in Odutokun's drawing and painting abilities.

Asidere's drawings also appear to share a narrative technique closely connected to Ben Osaghae, his Auchu contemporary. The two artists taught drawing and painting simultaneously at the school. Asidere's drawings seem to reflect Arnheim's (1997) idea of images of thought, relating to mental processes, especially those of an artist. Arnheim states thus,

an artist who makes a drawing of something he knows from memory... If you ask him from what model he is drawing, he may deny convincingly that he has anything like an explicit picture of the animal in his mind. However, as he works, he constantly judges the correctness of what he is producing on paper.

Asidere documents events he encounters, much like Osaghae, but he presents them in a distinctly different manner. The event reflects the artist's thinking and interpretation. This is evident in Duke's drawings. The drawing functions as a narrative, crafted by the artist in his pursuit of a clear artistic language to express his discontent with society, particularly concerning the aims of corrupt

politicians. His approach to drawing mirrors his ongoing quest for new ideas within the framework of traditional elements, including those rooted in his cultural heritage.

Theorisation of Asidere's Drawings

This section explores the art object, which includes two of Duke Asidere's drawings, in relation to his cultural influence. We assess whether this influence surpasses that of Odutokun and Osaghae, one of whom is his mentor and the other a colleague. Artists from the Delta region demonstrate a profound understanding of spiritual elements in their work. For example, Bruce Onobrapeya's images, when presented through his installations, appear to emerge in Asidere's drawings. It is important to consider George Smith's Theorisation of the artist philosopher as an embodiment that makes abstract philosophical concepts visible as tangible evidence of knowledge, and we suggest that Duke Asidere's works possess such potential. The drawings' ability to depict multiple attempts to engage with the discourse of his native cultural influences and to explore the cross-influence of European art techniques learned at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, is essential, as is the philosophical insight they generate. Practically, the aim is to combine visual artworks with a hermeneutic reading of Gadamer's philosophical text to develop a comprehensive discourse.

Duke's drawing achieves this goal. This study primarily examines the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and visual art; it is not a study of Gadamer's interpretation of the 'poetic word', which has been extensively analysed by other scholars. What is attempted here is a Gadamerian 'poetics' of the visual, examining the cultural and historical contexts that allow an image to communicate effectively. While this poetics must identify the elements within an artwork, it must also explore how these elements interact to make the work an effective means of communication. The principal value of this hermeneutical poetics lies in the answer it offers to a question posed in Heidegger's essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art': how do artworks 'work' and how should this 'working' be understood?

The answer addresses the core of Gadamer's aesthetics: how do silent images communicate? If the response succeeds, it can validate the central claim of his magnum opus: that art indeed has a demonstrable cognitive content. Two themes guide our reflections: what does it mean to be addressed by a speechless image, and what are the formal conditions for receiving that address? In a post-modern context, Gadamer's 'The artist's intention' may aim to employ figurative concepts to unveil the non-conceptual with concepts, revealing his ideas and perspectives on issues such as refugees and crises in the Arab world today, the unstable Syria, and armed conflicts worldwide—viewed as philosophical material that his drawings seem to disclose through arrangements of design elements and vigorous, contemplative lines.

Asidere's drawings serve as a basis for philosophical reflection. They embody Heidegger's view that the traditional philosophy of God, being, and object can be revealed through figurative symbolism, transforming the abstract into something understandable. Without a philosophical understanding of these drawings, their true significance would be diminished, and they would seem without potential; the principle of identity would be a blind fate forever prone to consuming non-identity, and the work of art would be reduced to mere clusters of lines in space, attempting to identify with material images in today's world.

Plate II may serve such thinking. There appears to be some distortion of forms to create a perfect image for the artist's understanding. From this knowledge, we discern the artist's mindset and intentions regarding his drawings. Image, according to Rudolf Arnheim (1997), is

A faint subjective representation of a sensation or perception without an adequate sensory input, present in waking consciousness as part of an act of thought. Includes memory images and imagination images; may be visual, auditory, or of any other modality, and also purely verbal.

This idea aligns with the artist's drawings and his presentation of subjective reality through linear lines that interact with space, time, and imagined forms. Recognising that the linear images Duke presents might be an unconscious flow from his native Delta region in Nigeria, and that they could offer viewers a hybrid of ancestral aesthetics and the European artistic culture under which the artist gained his degrees. This reflects the essence of modernism, which is often conflated with contemporary art practice. Duke Asidere's drawings carry a wealth of creative and theoretical energy for thinkers to reflect upon.

Conclusion: Meditation through Modernist Form

Modernist painting's emphasis on abstraction, linearity, and flatness invites a contemplative mode of viewing. By stripping away narrative and representation, modernist artists created visual environments that encourage introspection and meditative stillness. To meditate through linearity is to engage deeply with the spiritual and philosophical ambitions of modernism. These visual strategies, rooted in formal innovation and theoretical rigour, continue to shape contemporary artistic practice and viewer experience.

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