

Developmental History of Landscape Painting In Modern Nigerian Art: The Lagos State Example

by

Olusegun Jide Ajiboye
segunajib@gmail.com

&

Michael Olusegun Fajuyigbe
michofajuyigbe@gmail.com

Olusegun Jide Ajiboye teaches Paintings & Drawings in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. His areas of research include landscape studies, contemporary Nigerian arts/artists and sociology of art.

Michael Olusegun Fajuyigbe teaches Art History & Art Criticism in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. His research interest includes aesthetics, aesthetic education and sociology of art with respect to contemporary Nigerian art and artists.

Abstract

Nature and the built environment present diverse themes and contexts for artistic expression, and these have been the concern of artists throughout the ages, especially painters. This paper therefore examines the implantation of landscape painting as an artistic genre and a visual document of socio-economic and urban development in Nigeria, using as the basis Lagos (the orb of Nigeria's artistic practice and art marketing). Through literature, interviews and purposively selected works, the paper discusses some historical, political and socio-economic factors responsible for the growth of landscape painting in Lagos, Nigeria. The art of landscape painting in Lagos State, as revealed by the paper, dates back to the 1920s in Nigeria; and while the works of pioneer landscape painters focused on naturalistic realism, their contemporary counterparts explore diverse styles and thematic foci in their works. The paper concludes that the developmental history of landscape painting in Nigeria cannot be conclusive, until efforts are made by art scholars to capture its implantation and growth in other major cities/towns in the country.

Key Words: Landscape Painting, Modern, Art History, Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Art in any form or media is a device used for representing ideas, recording events, tracing physical advancements and capturing fleeting moments and feelings inspired by nature and human activities generally. In this regard, landscape art functions as a tool of historical documentation of the physical environment (and development) and validates the dynamics of human experiences and environmental changes overtime. Landscape painting, one of the visual art genres, is an art that dates back to the pre-independent era in Nigeria.

The story of landscape painting in Nigeria is encapsulated within the history of modern Nigerian art, which is traceable to the European influence on Nigerian visual expression. Europe, Britain precisely played a major role in the birth of landscape painting in Nigeria. This is because landscape painting is one of the components of easel painting which was never a tradition in Nigeria until the colonial experience. In addition, the early painters that could be considered as the forerunners of the art of landscape painting in Nigeria were trained in Britain.

It appears that several developments in different parts of Nigeria may have cumulated into the beginning of landscape painting in the country. According to (Ajiboye, 2005:48), John Rowland Ojo, an art historian and painter whose academic career was at the Obafemi Awolowo University spoke of a watercolour society which existed at his old school, Christ School, Ado-Ekiti in the late 1940s. The excerpt below vividly captured the picture of landscape painting in those early days in Christ School.

“In Christ School, Ado-Ekiti, I and my junior colleagues were introduced to landscape painting in water colours in the Wednesday afternoon hobby class by a geography teacher who came from England on six-month relieve duty. He painted the hilly country side, travelling as far as Idanre and Ikare; his water colours were in the best tradition of English landscape painting in water colour” (Ojo, 2002:2).

The exploits in landscape painting in Nigeria at these early times may not be limited to the aforementioned. There is however little record of the contributions of these earliest Nigerian modern painters to landscape painting in the pre-independent era in Nigeria except in few writings by foreigners like J. A. Danford, a colonial administrator and Uli Beier, a German ethnographer who was deeply involved in Nigerian art. Other writings similar to these are not commonly found in the body of literature on modern art in Nigeria. Definite records as to how and when the landscape painting tradition started in Nigeria are not easy to come by, as shown by the bulk of literature on the development of modern art in Nigeria.

The story of landscape painting, like that of modern Nigerian art, cannot be detached from the geographical and cultural dimensions of Lagos State. The State is usually considered as the orb of artistic activities and the most advanced in modern Nigerian art, both in practice and historically (Oyelola, 1998:21; Ochigbo, 2006:281; Spiesse, 2003:76; Babalola, 1995:8; Filani, 2005:26; Okeke-Agulu, 2011:13). Nigeria has produced many prolific landscape painters, and the most popular names in that genre are resident in Lagos State where they practice and have become well known (Okediji, 2012:34). Through literature, field study, interviews and purposively selected landscape paintings, this paper aims at constructing the early history of landscape painting in Nigeria using Lagos State as the basis. Also investigated are factors that have shaped the development of Lagos and contributed to the growth of the art genre.

Statement of Research Problem

The history of landscape painting in Nigeria is generally handicapped by inadequate literature. Most information on the genre is scattered in literature that are not intended for it; of which many are reports contained in pages or paragraphs found in different publications. Examples of such are Danford (1948), Beier (1960), Chukueggu (1998), Filani (2005), Konate (2008), Bosah & Edozie (2010), Egonwa (2011), Castellote (2012), and Ajiboye & Makinde (2011). Out of these, only Ajiboye & Makinde (2011) appears to have the most focused work on landscape painting. The work addressed the thematic foci of landscape painting in Lagos State and their influence on selected painters. With regard to the dearth of art historical studies on the commencement of the genre in Nigeria, this study therefore examines the development of landscape painting in modern Nigerian art. It however focuses its art historical lens on Lagos State, in addition to the causative agents responsible for the growth of landscape paintings in Nigeria.

Landscape Painting in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

Records of modern art in Nigeria point to the fact that what can be referred to as 'modern' in Nigerian art started in the pre-independent era with the practice of Aina Onabolu (1882-1963). He was unanimously regarded as the first recorded modern painter in Nigeria, whose practice and life was based in Lagos State from where he started laying the foundation for art education in Nigeria. Hence, the beginning of modern Nigerian art could be traced to the exploits and resilience of Aina Onabolu which dates back to the pre-independent Nigeria; precisely the 1900s. A picture of that time in the history of modern Nigerian art is vividly captured as follows:

“... in 1900, Aina started to practice as an artist, there was indeed not a single person known, nor any record of anyone who had practiced pictorial art in any scientific form. The pictorial traditions of Europe did not seem to have made any impact on the African mind in spite of years of trade between the peoples of Europe and Africa.” (Onobolu, 1963: 295)

The reactions of Onobolu to the notion that the African cannot produce or appreciate art like the white people made him an advocate of naturalism (Oloidi, 1995:193). This, coupled with the exposure of Nigerians to European painting styles, influenced the naturalism observed in early works of modern Nigerian art.

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The place of Aina Onobolu as an epochal figure in the developmental history of modern art in Nigeria, Africa inclusive, is affirmed by Oloidi (2011:20) who posits that “it has now become a historical landmark to know that Western art was introduced single-handedly and without any European assistance, to Africa by an African ...” It is on record that Aina Onobolu painted landscapes during his career (Ojo, 2002:2; Onobolu, 1963: 295). However, only his figure paintings which have survived are well recorded and studied. The fact that Aina Onobolu painted landscapes and there are no other records of established or known modern Nigerian painter before him makes it possible to strongly assert that landscape painting in modern Nigerian art must have commenced in the early 1900s with Aina Onobolu.

By 1940, Akinola Lasekan had distinguished himself as a self-taught nature painter (Oloidi, 1995:194). Adesanya (2008: 7) describes Akinola Lasekan as “more of a landscape and market scenes specialist and a cartoonist than anything else”. His “*Moremi*” at the Obafemi Awolowo University library has a background of nature which gives an idea of the naturalistic landscapes of the pre-independent period. According to Okediji (1989: 8, 11), Lasekan also made several landscape views of the Obafemi Awolowo University during his sojourn in the school in the late sixties and early seventies. One of such is “The University of Ife settling down on its Home Campus” (plate 1) which was executed during his days as artist-in-residence at the defunct Institute of African Studies at the University of Ife; now Obafemi Awolowo University. The work depicts the workers off-loading furniture into the Humanities’ Buildings with the environmental landscaping yet to be done. The work is dominated by the freshness of the light-brown soil around the buildings and the greys denoting the buildings, sky and the far distant vegetation. This and several other miniature landscape paintings further reveal him as a naturalist and well established landscape painter.

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Plate 1: Akinola Lasekan, *The University of Ife settling on its home campus, Jan. 1967*, oil on canvas, 48 x 62 inches, 1967. Collection of Obafemi Awolowo University.

Close study of the earlier contemporary Nigerian artists that painted landscapes show a great flavour for naturalistic depiction of nature. This seems to have been the case from pre-independence as revealed in the pictures of 1948 Nigerian exhibition which accompanies the article on Nigerian art by Danford (1948: 157-158). The photographs of the paintings give one an insight into the style of early landscape paintings in Nigeria. The exhibition which was organised under the auspices of the British Council showcased various landscape paintings by Adeyemi Adenuga, E. Okaybulu and D. Ebanda among many other artists.

Adeyemi Adenuga's "Oyo-Agunpopo Hill" (plate 2) shows a good understanding of the watercolour medium in his work depicting the hill with fresh and free flowing strokes indicating the vegetation and the clear sky. Danford (1948: 156) attests to Adenuga's mastery, noting that "his work is fresh and direct. He has a good knowledge of how to use his medium. Though the work is reproduced in black and white, his fresh and translucent application of the watercolour medium is not obscured. Unfortunately, much is not known about the painter except a couple of lines offered by Danford (1948: 156); "Mr. Adenuga teaches at the C. M. S. Grammar School, Lagos. He is interested chiefly in landscape painting and he works mostly in water colours".



Plate 2: Adeyemi Adenuga, *Oyo Agunpopo Hill*, pen drawing, 1950.
Source: *Nigeria Magazine*

Eke Okaybulu (1916-1958) was a master draughtsman whose works display a very high level of skill at naturalism and very obviously, a lot of experience and talent. This is not surprising because apart from the artist's exposure to training, he has experience as an illustrator of textbooks for Longman Publishers and posters for the Federal Ministry of Information (Kelly and Stanley, 1993:354). Just like Aina Onabolu, he has trained himself to a high level before formal training. "A Creek Scene" (plate 3), a landscape drawing by Okaybulu shows a skilful use of the drawing medium to depict an aesthetic and physical dimension of a creek, with a peaceful open vista. The lines, achieved with the pen drawing, are well calculated and ordered with a lot of patience and discipline. The perspective and depiction of nature, conveying the feeling of wide open space is remarkable.



Plate 3: E. Okaybulu, *A creek Scene*, pen drawing, 1950.
Source: *Nigeria Magazine*

D. Ebanda's landscape painting, "Near Ibadan" (plate 4) also displays a good draughtsmanship in landscape painting. The natural forms of nature are massed and combined into a composition that uses the footpaths and roads to lead the eyes into the centre of the painting without getting lost. Danford (1948: 172) rates him as "probably one of the best African landscape painters in Nigeria to-day, for his colour sense, arrangement and application of paint are excellent". Ebanda's watercolour is very comparable to that of Adeyemi Adenuga except that the later appears to have achieved more freshness and free flow of brush strokes. It is however not less in quality or skill.



Plate 4: D. Ebanda, *Near Ibadan*, water colour, Source: *Nigeria Magazine*

From these pictures, a lot of information on the personalities, style and theme can be deduced. A naturalistic style is very pervasive in the landscape paintings and drawings. There is also a strong display of love for nature while all of the landscapists are well skilled in the use of watercolour. Okaybulu's drawing particularly proves the deep understanding of the techniques involved in depicting the wide open vista with a limited medium (pen) and technique (line). Okaybulu actually had good experience as an illustrator who designed posters for the Federal Ministry of Information and did text book illustrations for Longman Publishers (Kelly and Stanley, 1993: 354). Observation of any of Longman text books will show that a high degree of skill in the naturalistic style was required for an illustrator to qualify for making illustrations for the company. So, it is no surprise that Okaybulu displayed high naturalism in his landscape painting. The level of mastery generally displayed by the painters indicates some experience which could not have been achieved in a short while; the skills displayed have undoubtedly taken a considerable time of consistent practice.

Ulli Beier, an ethnographer and a key player in the history of the development of art in pre and post-independent Nigeria gives a little picture of the prevalent style of landscape painting in pre-independent Nigeria. Beier (1960: 10) reveals that Ben Enwonwu also painted landscapes which were "naturalistic, and smoothly executed in rich colours". According to Beier (1960: 10), these landscape paintings "appeal to wide public and are his most popular work with most Nigerians". Examples of what he was referring to could be found in the watercolour titled "Jungle Landscape" (plate 5) which was done in 1943 and the oil on board, "Cotton Trees" done in 1949 by Ben Enwonwu.

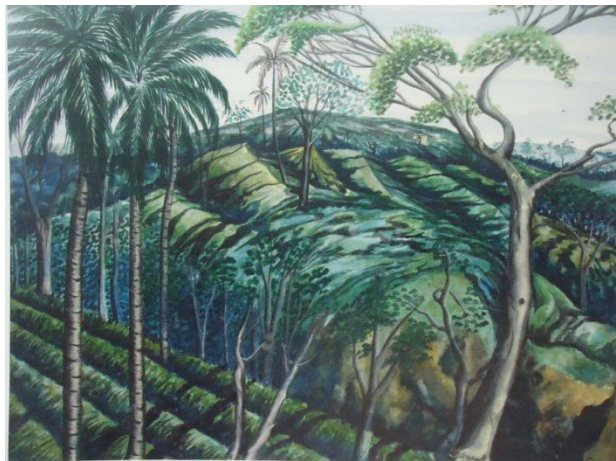


Plate 5: Ben Enwonwu, *Jungle Landscape*, water colour, 29 x 35cm, 1943.
Source: Africa Now, Bonhams, London.

Ben Enwonwu's landscape paintings show a love for nature. "Jungle Landscape" is filled with fresh vegetation, trees and palm trees that suggest some imagination especially in the foreground trees. "Cotton Trees" is more akin at showing us the mightiness of the trees by allowing us to compare the trees with humans. This is suggested by the depicted humans who are most likely to be wood loggers found around the base of the trees. Compared to Okaybulu's "Creek Scene", Enwonwu in "Jungle Landscape" seems subjected more to his imagination than faithfulness to objective realism.

Based on the few records available, these pioneer painters, Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Adeyemi Adenuga, E. Okaybulu, D. Ebanda and Ben Enwonwu are considered as some of the precursors of landscape painting in modern Nigerian art. It is also a fact that landscape painting has started for decades and has reached a standard before Nigeria's independence. It is quite clear from their works that the art of landscape painting in pre-independent Nigeria was of high quality. This observation is very significant because the European mode and medium of painting can be considered as fairly new in Nigeria at that time. The skill displayed in their paintings, especially those of E. Okaybulu, D. Ebanda and Adeyemi Adenuga could match that of any landscape painter from other countries with a legacy of landscape painting. From the pre-independent era through the 1970's onward till the contemporary times in Lagos State and Nigeria in general, landscape painting has grown in the number of practitioners, styles, themes and commercial viability.

Landscape Painting in Lagos Today

The history of landscape painting in Nigeria cannot be separated from the artistic activities and creative diversities of Nigerian artists resident in the city of Lagos. Many landscape painters in Nigeria today have had the opportunity to hone their skill in the art of landscape painting through their sojourn in Lagos. They have painted many landscapes from scenes derived from Lagos State (Plate 6). Many like Biodun Olaku, Kehinde Sanwo, Segun Adejumo, Ola Balogun and Emenike Ogwo who are still residents in Lagos as at the time of this research reveal that the State has not only inspired landscape themes but has also provided a lot of patronage. This corroborates the observation by Filani (2005: 26) that many landscape paintings have been inspired by the city life in Lagos.



Plate 6: Abiodun Olaku, *Grey Tunes*, oil on canvas, 95 x 110cm, 2005¹.
Source: Abiodun Olaku

Graduates of some formal art schools in Nigeria are particularly known for their exploits in the art of landscape painting in Lagos State. Graduates from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and those of the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos have made their marks on the sand of time in modern Nigeria art through landscape painting (Filani, 2005: 26; Okeke-Agulu, 2011: 13). Names like Joshua Akande and Kolade Oshinowo stand out among the Zaria graduates while Omolara Ige-Jacks, Abiodun Olaku, Segun Adejumo, Kekinde Sanwo and Otoki Olugbenga are known landscape painters from the Yaba College of Technology. Sam Ovrati, Alex Nwokolo and Ola Balogun are popular names from Auchu Polytechnic, while from the University of Benin, the name Kazeem Olojo-Kosoko readily comes to mind. The Lagos State Polytechnic can also boast of Damola Adepoju and Taiwo George-Taylor.

Among many artists in Lagos State who have done considerable landscapes in their professional careers are Abayomi Barber, Emmanuel Bojerenu, Josy Ajiboye, Dele Jegede, Kehinde Sanwo, Sam Ovrati, Abiodun Olaku, Ayodeji Shyngle, Lara Ige-Jacks, Oyerinde Olotu, Segun Adejumo, Kehinde Sanwo, Olufemi Otoki, Kazeem Olojo-Kosoko, Damola Adepoju, Akintunde John, Taiwo George Taylor, Chika Idu, Ola Balogun, Jonahan Jefferson, Mufutau Apooyin, Joe Nsek, Titus Agbara, Bimbo Adenugba and some others. All these artists and many not mentioned here have made their appearances several times in the Lagos art scene through landscape painting.

¹ This is a landscape painting based on Okobaba, a settlement of loggers and wood merchants in Lagos State, Nigeria

The great number of painters who practice landscape painting now cannot be compared to the few (according to the few records available) that practiced the art before independence. The 1948 Nigerian Art Exhibition reported by Danford (1948: 153) shows that only a few Nigerian painters dwelt on landscape painting. Today, there are many painters who dwell on landscape painting in Lagos so much so that some painters have written their names in the art history of modern Nigerian art through landscape painting. Good examples of such are Oyerinde Olotu, Kehinde Sanwo, Biodun Olaku, Kazeem Olojo-Kosoko, Olufemi Otoki and many others. The successes of these painters in landscape painting keep pulling younger artists into the genre in addition to some contributing historical factors in the state.

In cognizance of the successes of the landscape painters earlier mentioned, it is not surprising that landscape painting has become very common in exhibition halls and galleries. Common scenes like markets, commercial buses, skyscrapers, brown roof-tops, water fronts and Brazilian architecture, among others have become recurrent over the years. These scenes are popular because of their aesthetic appeal, compositional values and the art market demand. The scenes, which usually show the common people in their survival efforts, have become the defining visual and thematic characteristics of Lagos landscapes. These qualities can be found in the works of many painters like Kolade Oshinowo, Segun Adejumo, Bimbo Adenugba Jonathan Jefferson, Mufutau, Apooyin, Damola Adejupo and Kehinde Sanwo to mention a few.

The intra-city private commercial buses (gradually fading out for the emerging Lagos State BRT Buses) popularly referred to as *Molue* are always hot cakes in the Lagos art market. The new BRT Buses are even gradually making their entry into the landscape paintings of Lagos State through the works of young painters, including Olufemi Oyewole who displays a striking skill in watercolour painting. Urban city landscapes which commonly feature skyscrapers of the Lagos Island or the brown rooftops of the Mainland are also peculiar to the Lagos City landscape paintings as observed in the stylised paintings of Segun Oduleye. Painters like Kehinde Sanwo and Oyerinde Olotu have made commercial fortunes from painting landscape scenes of the old Lagos which was commonly typified by the old architectural style now known as the Brazilian architecture.

Growth of Landscape Paintings in Lagos State

Lagos state has played vital roles in the development of modern Nigerian art generally and particularly in the thematic growth of landscape painting. The contributory factors, however, cannot be overlooked. The socio-economic environment in Lagos metropolis has provided themes for landscape painting, which have been beneficial to understanding modern Nigerian art. The economy of Lagos State, in the context of the socio-economic evolution and political history of the Nigerian state, has been favourable to the growth of landscape painting and many landscape painters in the state. Obviously, the historical development of landscape painting in Nigeria has been determined and shaped by the geographical location of Lagos State as a harbour town, and the rural-urban drift which has pulled different classes of citizens to the city.

The political position of Lagos State as the nation's former capital before its relocation to Abuja has brought many embassies and corporate bodies which sponsor art and promote artists. The British council, the United States Information Services (USIS), the Italian Cultural Institute, the French Cultural Centre as well as the Goethe Institute have encouraged Nigerian artists by sponsoring and providing space for art exhibitions (Aig-Imoukhuede, 1991: 83). Despite the relocation of the federal capital to Abuja in 1991, "the art domain in Nigeria is Lagos", affirmed by Jegede (2012: 40). He asserts that the move did not reduce the status of Lagos as the cultural and financial capital of Nigeria; rather, it has "rejuvenated and recast the city as the locus of activity in the contemporary art sphere". Okediji (2012: 34) in agreement states that "...at first it appeared that Abuja will over-shadow Lagos, and that the former capital city will become a ghost of its former self. The opposite however proves to be true. Lagos has continued to be the commercial and artistic city in Nigeria..." As a result, the state has become a meeting ground for sponsors, artists and art critics at local and international levels.

Lagos of the late 1970s and early 1980s attracted more artists due to the new artistic awareness generated by the rise in purchasing power of the citizenry; hence, many art graduates exhibited in Lagos. With patronage from expatriates and some Nigerians elites who later perceived art collecting as investment and status symbol, Lagos becomes a kind of "Mecca of the art world" Oyelola (1998:21). The oil boom of the seventies pushed a lot of money into the economy which increased the purchasing power of the citizens who gradually developed a cultic taste for art as an expression of wealth and class. More members of the elite society find it prestigious to belong to the rising guild of art collectors; because they now realised the aesthetic relevance of art in their homes and offices. Art eventually became a status symbol even when the emergency art connoisseurs are almost ignorant of the deeper meanings and importance of what they were collecting. Tagging art works (including landscape paintings) in an exhibition became fashionable, a sign of belonging to an elite society. This meant more business for the artists and galleries, a trend that corroborates the notion that many artists were attracted to Lagos State because of the seemingly booming art business.

A natural reaction to the inflow of the artists and the increase in purchasing power of the citizens is the growth of galleries in Lagos state. Eventually, Lagos became one of the states with the highest number of galleries in the nation and perhaps the highest concentration of painters in any Nigerian state. Among these galleries are the Felix Idubor Gallery which moved to Benin and the Gong Gallery; both are the earliest private galleries in Nigeria in the 1970s (Aig-Imoukhuede, 1991:83). He further reveals that many private galleries began operations shortly after the National Gallery of Modern Art was opened in Lagos in 1981. This trend contributed to the growth of art generally. In agreement, Ikpakronyi (2008) opines that the rise of private galleries in Lagos in the 1970s signalled the interest of the press (both print and electronic media) in the 1980s by giving covering art events especially when it occurs in Lagos.

In addition to this is the emergence of organizations devoted to the expansion, sustenance and growth of art within 2006 and 2009. This includes Visual Arts Society of Nigeria, (VASON) and Omoba Yemisi Adedoyin Shyllon Art Foundation (OYASAF). Both VASON and OYASAF materialised through the efforts of three great art collectors in Lagos namely Sammy Olagbaju and Rasheed Gbadamosi, and Yemisi Shyllon respectively. The 1970s and the 1980s also witnessed a renaissance in artistic intellectualism in Nigeria with many artists proving their intellectual abilities by getting involved in writing and publishing their academic discourses. Artists like Yussuf Grillo, Dele Jegede, Batunde Lawal, Shina Yussuf and Oboira Udechukwu are well noted (Oloidi, 67-68).

The obvious economic depression of early 1980s called for a creative response from the rank and file of Nigerian artists in tackling the austerity measures introduced by the military junta. Aig-Imoukhuede (1991:83) was more specific, noting that “between 1979 and 1983, the second republic engaged itself in an economic recklessness, which in part, necessitated a military coup in 1983 and the government responded with the slogan that self-employment is best employment. It was a challenge which artists enthusiastically took and which has resulted in very unprecedented upsurge in the number of exhibitions especially in Lagos”. It is logical therefore to expect that galleries will grow in response to the need of artists to have exhibitions. Jegede (1992:26) captures the resultant artistic hustle and bustle of the 1990s when he observes that, “artists, especially in Lagos, queue up for exhibition spaces most of which now attract fees”.

In line with the above, Okwuosa (2012: 86) reports that the gallery business in Lagos grew mostly in the 1980s and 1990s, due to the improved financial status of a good number of individual and corporate bodies. He notes further that “no less than 50 art exhibitions take place in Lagos every year with a duration of usually between one and three weeks” (Okwuosa, 2012: 88). During this period, an appreciable number of indigenous collectors, finance houses, banks, and oil companies acquired contemporary artworks and commissioned site specific projects. This artistic boom later influenced artists like Abiodun Olaku (a foremost Nigerian landscape painter), Edosa Oguigo (a highly respected figure painter) and Rom Isichei (a painter with peculiar minimalist and abstract mannerisms) to quit their jobs in government and private sectors and settle for professional practice.

Lagos offers a lot of interesting experiences in its crowded population and daily race for survival. It is therefore easy for collectors to identify with the themes that go in that direction. In the 1980s and 1990s, the themes like transportation ‘*molue* buses’ (Plate 7) and Lagos shanties became very popular with collectors. There could not have been any better way to express these themes except through landscape painting.

Places like the eradicated shanty town of Maroko, the Okobaba and Ajegunle shanties and the ever busy, dirty and disorderly Oshodi became common scenes in landscape paintings that focused on Lagos. Ola Balogun, Taiwo George-Taylor and Damola Adepoju, members of the “de Factori” studio agreed that these themes are hot cakes in Lagos because they are commonly sought after by collectors (personal communication, 2009). In addition, Segun Adejumo (Plate 8), a painter based in Lagos opines that landscape paintings showing scenes of Lagos are internationally renowned, and thus enhances their collectability (personal interview, 2013).

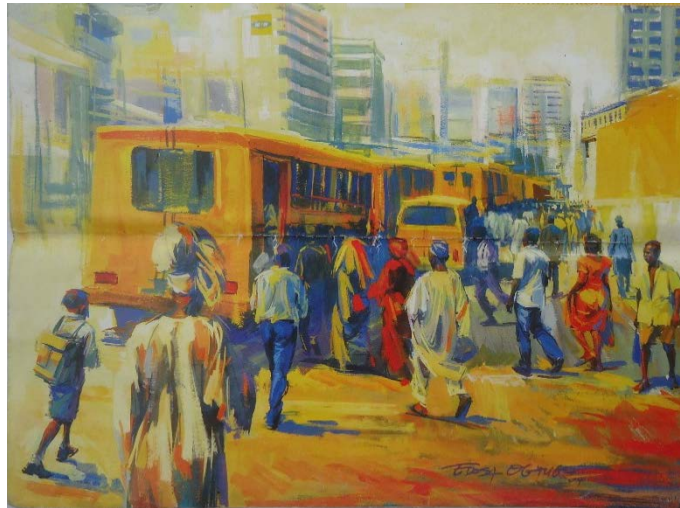


Plate 7: Edosa Oguigo, *The Molue*, Acrylic, 2004.
Source: MTN Calendar 2005.

Another contributory factor to the growth of landscape paintings in Lagos is that the genre sometimes requires less rigorous compositional calculations since many are based on some specific sites like Oshodi and Okobaba for instance. Dotun Alabi, a painter who has painted and sold several landscapes of Lagos (since 1994), corroborates this assertion. In addition to compositional advantages, he affirms the commercial value and marketability of landscape paintings, stating categorically that “Lagos is the centre of art marketing and landscapes sell more in Lagos than any other place in Nigeria” (personal interview, 2013).



Plate 8: Olusegun Adejumo, *Oshodi Rhythm*, oil on canvas, 112 x 147cm, 2008. Source: Olusegun Adejumo

Lagos is a “relatively prosperous environment” says Jegede (2012: 42). Indeed, it is a land of opportunities. With respect to art business, many artists in Lagos still consider the city as the best place for experience and survival. The supportive factors according to Jegede (2012: 42) include the presence of a thriving print and electronic media that promotes art; the concentration of a very high number of galleries and art centres, and a strong presence of multinationals and financial institutions within the city; in addition to the existence of academic and public institutions (Yaba College of Technology, University of Lagos and the Pan African University) which offer training and promotion in visual arts. Dotun Alabi ascribes the reasons for the popularity of Lagos landscape paintings to the activities of the ‘Yaba Tech’ painters and their naturalistic representation of common everyday scenes, among others.

A contemporary painter in the city, Damola Adepoju (Plate 9) whose works focused on Lagos prefers the city to any other place in Nigeria. His choice was influenced by the availability of patronage for his landscape paintings and the opportunities for sales through galleries and exhibitions. He disclosed that his landscape instinct and inspiration is fuelled by the city life in Lagos. He explains further that collectors in Lagos favour landscapes which depict life in the city of Lagos. Many of the works sold by these artists were Landscapes of the city of Lagos, Damola Adepoju disclosed that he has actually sold over a hundred of such landscape paintings (personal communication, 2009). This goes to prove the observation by Spiess and Fourchard (2003: iv) that the city has attracted artists from all over the country for exhibition or for permanent stay. There is no doubt that the state has contributed a lot to the development of modern Nigerian art in Nigeria by providing patronage, opportunities and exposure to artists, including landscape painters.



Plate 9: Damola Adepoju, *Ijora Bridge*, mixed media, 91 x 122cm, 2009. Source: Damola Adepoju

Historical and geographical fate has made Lagos State an economic centre in Nigeria which has pulled different classes of citizens together. The state has been resourceful by providing a cosmopolitan city with ever expanding economy which underlies the patronage that has kept and developed the artists by providing them economic survival. Many other professionals and non-professionals perceived Lagos as a gold city and trooped in, thereby constituting a great flow of fortune seekers to Lagos. Many of this population settled in a city that was not properly prepared for them and the resultant effect of this is that the few places with concentration of industries became overpopulated with people.

The practical effect of the above situation is that, the realities on ground suddenly kick the fortune seeker out of his dream. He realises to his discomfort that gold is not picked on the streets of Lagos. The fact is that socio-economic resources and infrastructures are not enough to go round. Therefore, the average citizen in Lagos state has to work through thick and thin to survive and keep his head above the waters. This explains why the average '*Lagosian*' is always in a hurry and the whole state seems to be constantly in fast motion. This has often been the theme of many landscape paintings for instance, Kehinde Sanwo's "Afternoon Frenzy" (plate 10).



Plate 10: Kehinde Sanwo, *Afternoon Frenzy*, oil on canvas.
60 x 90cm. Source: Olusegun Ajiboye

The urban problems which have resulted from the in-flow of fortune-seeking population into Lagos state has provided themes for the artists to explore. The poverty in the densely populated and poorly planned areas of the state, poor transportation problems, poor sanitary conditions and the generally hard conditions of living in the state can be read in the contents of the landscape paintings done by the painters, most of whom are residents in the state and part of the experiences. This is reflected when Jegede (1991:15) comments that, “Indeed, the committed artist will discover, over time, that the studio is not just a workplace; it is a therapeutic clinic where his peevish affliction, already exacerbated by the exigencies of living in a restless city such as Lagos, is assuaged”. As earlier observed by Filani (2005:26), the activities in Lagos state provided many of the themes and contents of landscape painters.

Findings and Recommendations

The study revealed that landscape painting in Nigeria has an undefined, non-definitive and almost less-striking beginning in the context of modern Nigerian art history. In modern and contemporary Nigerian art history, the story of landscape painting cannot be delineated from the general history of painting in Nigeria. The study also shows human capacity to respond visually and creatively to their social and geographical environment which comprises of nature, the elements, tangible structures and human activities.

A comparative study of landscape painting in pre-independent and contemporary Nigeria shows that there is growth in the number of artists showing interest in the genre and also great development in the diversity of style and themes. The landscape painters of the 1940s in Nigeria till the 1960s painted dominantly in the naturalistic style while the contemporary landscape painters today explore diverse styles and thematic foci. The variety of themes observed is expressions of the different aspects of life and living in Lagos State. Personal stylistic identities are now more identifiable than before. There is a notable growth in the number of painters that practiced the art in contemporary times when compared to the pre-independent era and the 1960s. The many styles that are now available are also an indication of growth in comparison to the naturalist school of the early 20th century.

However, enough academic work has not been done on the history and growth of the art in Nigeria; hence, the history and development of landscape painting cannot be conclusive until efforts are made by art scholars to capture its implantation in other major cities/towns in the country. More so, a lot of the landscape painters have not been systematically studied and documented for their contributions and influences on landscape painting in Lagos State, Nigeria..

Conclusions

The history of landscape painting in Nigeria cannot be traced without studying its inception and growth in Lagos State. This paper has succeeded in tracing the rudimentary stage and growth of landscape art in Nigeria, using Lagos as the basis; since the story of modern Nigerian art was also began and nurtured in the city of Lagos from whence it spread to other parts of Nigeria. In addition, the paper posits landscape painting as a visual document with respect to dynamics of human existence, the struggles and challenges posed by the changing realities of organised built environment. It can be concluded therefore that landscape painting which started in the 1900s in Lagos State Nigeria has grown to command a lot of adherents and undeniably formed a strong part of contemporary art in Nigeria.

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