

Public Sculpture Artists in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Issue of anonymity of artists particularly in the public art in Nigeria has been a problem in art history. The issue is already affecting the study of public outdoor sculptures in the Southwestern Nigeria. Since public outdoor sculptures are vulnerable to poor technical handling, physical attack through religion and socio-political crises; many of the works are prone to short life and inherent loss of vital art historical information. Yet, the monuments, borne of vital historical continuum of the nation, have not been properly studied. The artists of the public outdoor sculptures, the rich mine of critical examination of the contextual meanings and the general records of the works are largely anonymous. Against this backdrop, an examination of public outdoor sculpture artists becomes inevitable; to track the artists' identities and assess the inherent art historical information in the art through them. The choice of Southwestern Nigeria for this study is informed by the preponderant use of public outdoor sculpture, numerous artists involved in the practice and particularly the problem of artist's anonymity clearly evident in the zone. This study focuses attention on the biographical study of the artists of public outdoor sculpture in the Southwest. It identifies them and discusses the biography of the samples of the outstanding artists known within their areas of practice. Significantly, this study, one of the pioneering efforts in the art, provides biographical records of the public outdoor sculptors vis-à-vis, their works and presented in art historical context.

Keywords: Artist, Artist's Biography, Art training, Public outdoor sculpture, Southwestern Nigeria

Introduction

The Yoruba artists, as in any other culture, are the major life force of artistic practice in their community. They are the major stakeholders who respond to the prevailing social experience, and creatively interpret them in visual forms, for the appreciation and use of the public. Societal ills and positive developments across generations are clearly expressed in varying contextual predispositions based on the right iconography and conventional styles. Their training backgrounds, general attitudes to work, and life style and experiences often affect their creativities. This is the reason that biographical information are usually necessary and important to art historians to assess the records of art of the same provenance and stylistic tendencies. Such information is very important in the art historical reconstruction of the Yoruba whose past up to the nineteenth century was predominantly non-literate but largely formed a continuum up the present and still exert some influences on artistic practices up to the present period. Scholars such as Thompson (1973: 19 – 61), Bascom (1973:62 – 78), Walker (1989), Fagg (1990), Adepegba (1992), Kalilu (1992:49 – 63), Picton (1994), Abiodun (1994, 1990:63 – 89) have used the idea to solve some art historical problems such as: aesthetics, artists anonymity, and chronology. Biographical study of artists is also germinate to charting a rich art historiography of African art which Segy (1969), Vasina (1987), Kalilu (1992:49-63) Adepegba (1995) have brilliantly and successfully attempted.

The advantages of biographical study of artists discussed above are also applied to the study of public outdoor sculpture in the Southwest, the focus of this study. Public sculptures in reference here, are sculptures erected in the public spaces such as: roundabouts, road highlands, parks and gardens. Confined spaces within the shrines, government or corporate institutions are also public spaces but sculptures located in such areas are excluded but only alluded to in some cases in this study.

The Yoruba are the major inhabitant of the Southwest of Nigeria. The zone comprised of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti States. The Yoruba sub-ethnic groups in Kwara and Kogi states are also regarded culturally, as part of the Southwestern Nigeria. For this reason, they are also included in the focus of this study. The Yoruba has a long history of preponderant art creation. Willet (1966:n.p) and Fagg (1990:17, 27-28 and 117-151) have discussed the fecundity of the Yoruba art. They observed; ninety percent of the wood carvings in Africa were produced by the Nigerian artists with the Yoruba artists in the fore-front. Basically, their arts have been used in the service of the traditionally religion and leadership roles. Until the introduction of Islamic, Christian religions and western culture into Nigeria, traditional Yoruba art thrived in archetype and patronage. At the emergence of the contemporary art; the Yoruba and their artists have also played the leading role in Nigeria. Aina Onabolu regarded as the father of contemporary art in Nigeria, (a Yoruba man) with other Yoruba artists such as; Akinola Lasekan, Justus Akeredolu and a few others were the pioneers of the nascent art.

In the new art, the University of Ibadan, where art workshops, seminars, symposia and exhibitions were held in the 60s became a veritable art centre in the formative stage of the contemporary art. Osogbo and Ile-Ife, both Yoruba cities, became art centres where many contemporary artists such as: Jimoh Burmoh, Murina Oyelami, Taiwo Olaniyi, popularly called Twins seven seven, Nike Okundaye and others emerged. Like in the traditional art practice, the contemporary art soon began to enjoy patronage. Paintings, sculptures, ceramic objects were commissioned by individuals, organizations and government to decorate homes and public places. Batik, tie-dye also enjoyed unprecedented patronage during and after Festival of Black Art and Culture (FESTAC '77) held in Nigeria in 1977. Graphic art also was well patronized by the advertisement industry and individuals.

However, the use of public sculpture perhaps formed its root in the *Elerede* sculpture located at Idi-Agbata, Arakale area in Akure by 1905. But the use of sculpture for

beautification of environment was later employed by the church as from the second decade of twentieth century. It was not until 1934 before outdoor sculpture was erected in the public space in Nigeria. The *Ogedengbe staff*, commissioned by the British home government, was erected in the large space in front of Owa's Palace, Ilesa in 1934. (Akintonde 2009) No sooner the first figural sculpture *Sojadumata* (the *Unknown soldier*) in Nigeria was erected at Idumota area in Lagos, than many other statues were also erected in Lagos and other Yoruba cities. By late 80s the use of outdoor sculpture in the public environment for beautification had become a common place; only to reach a proliferation level in the last decade of twentieth century. As proliferated as the art, so large in number were the artists of outdoor sculpture; however, only few of the artists are versatile and well known.

Up till 1980, Ben Enwonwu was the only indigenous sculptor, known to have executed public sculptures in the pre-independence time in Nigeria. His works, however, were located in front of corporate and on the walls of government buildings in the Southwest. As from 1981, better trained artists started executing ambitious public sculptures in the cities of Southwestern Nigeria. Some of these artists are: Tolu Filani, Abayomi Berber, Tiri Oladimeji, Moses Akintonde, Godstime Nwaji and many others. By 1991, artists in the field have risen astronomically in number, manifesting the effects of different shades of training and competence in the production of outdoor sculpture in the region. The necessity to urgently beautify the public environment and the resultant constant patronage the artists received later gave way to proliferation of the art, with its attendant problems. The problems on poor professionalism on the part of many artists have been hinged on inadequate training and lack of experience and poor method of commissioning of work as well as poor supervision of sculpture production (Akintonde 2009). However, despite the proliferation, a few artists who are skillful and well experienced also continued to practice side by side with the mediocre, presenting a matrix in the art practice; a study of which has not been properly addressed scholarly.

In view of the fore-going, the study identified inadequate documentation of art historical records of public outdoor sculptures in the previous studies. Much of the problem is on the poor identification of the artists of public sculptures and their details. For example, many of their works were usually not signed. The patrons who could also facilitate the identity of the artists do not usually remember their details after a short period of time. In most cases, poor records of commissioned works are generally kept. Usually, the situation is the same in government establishments; where records should be properly kept. In some cases, the anonymity problem usually obscures good understanding of meaning and the underlining factors that influence some artists' messages. For instance, out of one hundred and sixty six public outdoor sculptures enumerated in Southwestern Nigeria (Akintonde, 2009), larger percentage of the works were not signed and the artists who produced the works were difficult to identify. As a result, only scanty information was also available on the works.

However, as the practice become wide and complex, so is the need to study the biography of the artists become apparent, especially when the artists can still be reached for interviews and when their memories are relatively fresh in the minds of their patrons. This, to a large extent will solve the problem of anonymity that is still bedeviling art history in Nigeria.

This study examines the public outdoor sculpture artists from the emergence of the art to the present. It basically studies the biographies of the artists *via-a-vis* their works and noting their various development in style and technical proficiency. Although outdoor sculptors in the Southwest of Nigeria are many, only a few prominent ones were selected for this study. Ten prominent artists of the public outdoor sculptures were selected out of the sixty-seven identified. One artist Esso, though not skillful but he is well known in his area;

the works of the artists are larger in number and more wide spread in Offa, Igosun and two other towns than the works of other sculptors. For these reasons, Esso was also included in the study. Out of one hundred and sixty-six sculptures surveyed as at 2009, the ten artists made thirty-one sculptures which are spread across the six states of the Southwest and Yoruba sub-groups in Kwara and Kogi states. Basically artists who made sculptures erected at roundabouts, road Islands, road sides, parks and gardens were only considered. Significantly, the study records history of the artists and their works. It is hoped the study would help good understanding of the public outdoor sculptures in the Southwest of Nigeria and probably, become useful for future similar research in Nigerian art.

Scholarship on public outdoor sculpture in Southwestern Nigeria is just beginning. The first noticeable study, Odiboh (1987), is a master degree dissertation that examines origin, style and the uses of outdoor sculpture in the Lagos metropolis. It was not until 1999 that similar research work was made on public sculpture in the zone. The study of Adelowo (1999), "Outdoor Sculptures in Ibadan Metropolis" was based almost on the template of Odiboh (1987), except that Odiboh study is more detailed in discussion. Adisa (1999), another work on the same issue studied forms and contents of outdoor sculpture in Ibadan metropolis in his master degree dissertation. His study is even more limited in scope and discussion than Adelowo's study. The journal article of Akintonde (2004) which examines public sculptures in some cities of Osun State is also general and brief in discussion. However, Akintonde's doctoral dissertation on outdoor sculpture in the Southwest is a comprehensive work (Akintonde 2009). He surveys outdoor sculptures in the Southwestern Nigeria critically it investigates the general attitudes in the practice of the art and analyzed the works. However, apart from a general mention of names of artists, he did not devote any portion of the work to biographical study of the artists.

Although similar study on the issue has also been made by Ikpakronyi (1997) his work are also based on general study of public sculpture in Owerri and Enugu as well as Benin (Ikpakronyi 2005). Folarin's (1981:28-31, 1998:58-68 and 1993:125-132) studies are only based on the use of urban sculpture generally for the decoration of public environment. From the fore-going, few scholars who studied the "new art" have not worked extensively on biographies of the public sculpture artists as it has been done in the study of contemporary painting in Nigeria. For instance, scholarships on Nigerian painters are rich and deep in discussion. Brown (1966), Mount, (1973), Fosu (1986), Willett (1973), Jegede (1990:29-47), Adepegba (1995), Babalola (1995) and many other scholars have published well researched studies on Nigerian artists who are mostly painters. Apart from Ben Enwonwu and Abayomi Berber whose sculptures also adorned the Southwest cities, no other public outdoor sculptor was mentioned in their publications. The two artists' paintings were even, mostly studied by scholars. However, public outdoor sculpture is also vital in the development of contemporary art history in the Southwest. The practice which formed another nuances in Nigeria contemporary art, is barely scratched on the surface. The biographical study of the public outdoor sculpture will surely enrich history of contemporary Nigerian art.

The Artists

The artists of the Southwest public outdoor sculpture are of different cultural background; some of them are Igbo while those in the majority are Yoruba. However, all worked within Yoruba cultural context. The only one, Chuka, from Enugu whose works were at variance with the Yoruba cultural style had his works rejected.

Tiri Oladimeji: Tirimisiyu Oladimeji is an indigene of Ibadan. Born in 1955, Tiri (as he is popularly called by friends) started formal training in art at Auchi Polytechnic, where he had Ordinary Diploma and Higher National Diploma in Art (Specializing in Sculpture) in 1977 and 1980 respectively. He later obtained a Bachelor of Art Degree in Fine Art

(sculpture) at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, with First Class Hons in 1989. He obtained Master of Art Degree in African Studies (Visual Arts) in 1993; and later bagged a PhD Degree in Art History in the same University in 2002. His sound educational background exposed him to excellent studio practice and rigorous scholarship.

In Studio practice, Tiri has made many sculptures. His most outstanding public outdoor sculptures are the popular *Iba Oluyole* and *Iba Oderinto* erected at Bere and Mapo junctions respectively (plate 1 and 2). Tiri usually employs traditional themes in his composition. His subject matters are highly rich in tradition, striking in instruction and aesthetic pleantry. His forms are usually expressed in realism, dramatic and colossal in size. Tiri's *Iba Oluyole* and *Oderinlo* are massive and muscular; well-proportioned and dynamic in balance, coupled with fluidity of lines, sensual tactile surface quality and subtle patina simulation on the whole form. Although, the artist is greatly skillful in handling fibre glass and fundu cast as evident by some of his works in private collections, his major outdoor sculptures and many other sculpture figures were made in reinforced concrete and patinated with gold dust highlight on dark tone, mat background technique. Tiri's patrons cut across different socio-strata. He receives commissions from government, clubs, corporate organization, nobility and private individuals. He has organized three solo exhibitions and participated in over thirteen group exhibitions. Tiri has also published many journal articles and books on art. He is a member of Society of Nigerian Artists and Nigerian Association of Teachers of Technology amongst others. As a seasoned administrator, he held many administrative positions which include: headship of department and later became Dean School of Vocational Studies at Special College of Education Oyo. He was the Provost of Federal Teacher's College, Akoka, Lagos, in 2007 – 2012. In the recent time, his teaching and administrative work as well as religion and community services are beginning to take him away from the studio practice.



Plate 1

Tiri Oladimeji, *Iba Oluyole*, cement,
Height: 300m, 1987, Beere, Ibadan.

Photograph by Trans Assurance Plc. 1996



Plate 2

Tiri Oladimeji, *Iba Oderinlo*, cement,
Height: 270cm, 1991, Mapo, Ibadan

Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2007

Saburi Adisa Adebessin: Saburi was formally a Deputy Director at the Ogun State Employment Generation. He is an outstanding outdoor sculptor in Abeokuta. Saburi who is in

his early fifties is an indigene of Abeokuta. He attended Nurudeen Grammar School Abeokuta. Although, Fine Art was not offered in his school then, it was obvious that he had great interest for drawing. He eventually attempted art in General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level and was successful. He proceeded to the Polytechnics, Ibadan, for his Ordinary Diploma and Higher National Diploma in Fine Art (Sculpture), between 1983 and 1987. He had his Master Degree in Environmental Management in 2001 at the University of Ado Ekiti.

Saburi's first major outdoor sculpture was the *Ademulegun* erected in Ile-Ife Motor Park Junction, Ondo, He produced the statue during his NYSC service in Ondo. The statue however, was later removed and replaced with another one, made by Adeola Balogun. Apart from this, Saburi also made many outdoor sculpture figures, mostly located in Abeokuta Metropolis. Some of his works are: *Lisabi* (plate 3) at Itoko Abeokuta, *Gbedu Drummer* located at the main gate of Ogun State Council for Art and Culture. Four of his works, *Ogboni*, *Pot bearer* (a water fountain), a *Youth with Catapult* and a giant gong were also erected at strategic places within the garden of Ogun State Council for Art and Culture. *Seriki Abbas* statue which Saburi also made is an outstanding work, erected in front of Ayetoro Palace, Yewa, Ogun State.

Saburi's, choice of themes were from traditional genre. His expressions are usually, dramatical in nature. Themes eulogizing patriotic feat of Egbas both dead and the living were expressed by him to inspire the public civic responsibility. His *Ogboni* according to him is a testament of a vibrant traditional democratic Yoruba system of government. The *Ogboni* role in traditional government was brought into bear by the depiction of image of *Ogboni* member in full regalia and erected in the garden of Ogun State Council for Art and Culture. Contrary to the Christian and Islamic religions erroneous perception of *Ogboni* as esoteric in nature and evil, Saburi says "the Ogboni's role is noble. They maintain checked and balanced authority in a true democracy, unlike the 'Eurocentric' democracy which Nigeria badly adopted". However, his *Lisabi* is a good memoriam to the valiant Egba warrior who staked his life to liberate and secured total freedom for the Egbas who might have been annihilated like their immediate neighbours - the Ijays.



Plate 3

Saburi Adebesein, *Lisabi Agbongbo Akala*,
Fibre glass, height: 180cm, 2004, Itoku, Abeokuta.
Photograph by Moses Akintonde, 2007

Saburi's figures are expressed in realism. They are life size (plate 3) or slightly more than life size. His only work which is colossal is the *Ademulegun* statue. Except in the treatment of finger and toes, that are usually schematized, his forms are well proportioned and properly finished. His main medium of expression is polyester resin (fibre glass); the handling which he understands very well. All his works are in good state. The simulated patina in his works are still vibrant. He says the vibrancy is due to the techniques he usually employs for metallic patina. He mixes desired colour with resin and then applied it on his works. In this case, the colour luxuriance becomes fairly permanent. The surface texture of his works is made up of horizontal strokes clearly juxtaposed to present a concordance rhythm along the concaves and convexes of forms. Ogun State Council for Art and Culture, the Alake Chiefs and a few rich individuals are his patrons.

Kenny Adamson: Kenny is a cartoonist, painter and sculptor. He was born in 1951. He had his Ordinary National Diploma (OND) certificate in Fine Art at Yaba College of Technology in 1977. He has staged many art exhibitions in the country; and also produced many works including sculptures made for dignitaries such as Queen Elizabeth II, President George Bush and some African leaders. He had the first joint exhibition in 1983 at Didi Museum, Victoria Island, Lagos and another Solo exhibition at the same venue in 1990.

Kenny is a renowned cartoonist with Vanguard Newspapers in the eighties; he presented a different stylistic trend among the outdoor sculptors in the Southwest of Nigeria. His cartoon figures though schematic and lucid, they are plastic in form. This same form, he aptly expressed in his sculptures of the two outdoor sculptures credited to him in Lagos metropolis. The *Monument to Kudirat Abiola* vividly betrays his cartoon orientation (plate 4). Expressed in realism, the figures are pictorial with little emphasis on details, but having good attempt at symmetric balance; in the manner he throws the heads of his figures in alternating directions, purposely to create a balanced composition. The sculpture is the only relief work in the public place in the Southwest of Nigeria. The linear decoration on the sides of the relief also aligned with cartoon idea.

Apart from *Monument to Kudirat Abiola*, some of his works are also located at the Presidential Villa in Abuja. His sculptures of First Bank Plc. logo and the sculpture at the new Tinubu Square, Lagos are classical in conception and execution. The new Tinubu Square was redesigned by Kenny Adamson and he also supervised the construction which Julius Berber executed at the site. Kenny's free standing sculptures were far better in form treatment and good study of human anatomy than his recent works. He is very proficient in the technical handling of polyester resin he used in the in casting of his figures.



Plate 4

Kenny Adamson, *Monument to Kudirat Abiola*, fibre glass, (390 x 360 x 90) cm
2004, Seven-Up, Ikeja, Lagos

Photograph by Sola Ogunfuwa, 2007

Dejo Akinlonu: It is a bit difficult to classify Dejo Akinlonu into a group of low skilled sculptors who practice art by the road side along the popular streets in the mega cities of the Southwest. Akinlonu's "open-air gallery" as he glibly called it is located at Secretariat-Ikosi Road Junction, Alausa Area of Ikeja, Lagos. At a glance, Akinlonu's place could be regarded undoubtedly, as another road-side sculpture studio. But under propare examination, the whole strip of land space bedecked with variegated sculpture figures is a unique embodiment of modern outdoor sculpture in its own right.

Akinlonu described the place as a gallery where sculpture may be viewed, interrogated and appreciated freely like any other outdoor sculpture in the public environments. Akinlonu says he was the first artist to start this type of open gallery in Nigeria. His claim might be true to some extent, because the place is purposely arranged daily to allow audience derive maximum enjoyment of creative ingenuity of the artist. More works are often added to the existing ones.

Dejo Akinlonu's art background is a paradox to behold. He is a latent talent, over flow with creative fecundity. Yet, he was not allowed to study art. Instead, he was persuaded to study sales and marketing by his uncle. He later studied Graphic Art in the Institute of Printing and Graphic, Lagos, after which he began to receive commissions in art gradually. His marketing and salesmanship experience had profound impact on his art profession. For instance, it helped him in business organization and diversification, particularly, when the going was rough. Akinlonu who is fast becoming an enigma in art circle says, he did not actually learn sculpture, rather he picked it up intuitively and developed on his skill over-time, until he perfected it. Before he moved to his permanent site, he had already attracted many patrons who warmly sought after his arts.

Providence lead Akinlonu to limelight when he donated a seven hundred thousand naira (about four thousand US dollars) worth of water fountain to the Government of Lagos state; complimenting the effort of the then Military Administration of Brigadier Olagunsoye

Oyinlola's *Operation Beautify Lagos* in 1992. The fountain was erected on the site which he later used as his studio. The commissioner in charge of the Lagos beautification scheme, later, introduced Akinlolu's proposal on environmental beautification in Lagos to the Military Administrator who promptly allocated him the site, free of charge. Since then he had turned the place into a tourist attraction. Akinlolu whose art practice now spanned twenty four years (1985 – 2009) when this data was collected, has embarked on DEJAK Artistic Foundation, because the gallery is becoming too large to manage solely by him. He claimed the proceed from the foundation will be used to maintain the place by a board of trustees.

Akinlolu's forms, generally are massive and organic (plate 5). His style oscillates around realism and abstraction. He has flare for well-defined subtle forms and good finishing. His metallic patina techniques employ for work surface embellishment is superb. In architectural sculpture for open environment, he expresses his forms in captivative granite stone arrangement, bound with cement mortal and occasionally interspersed with metal, sculpture. An incredible granite stone structure he fashioned into a two bedroom apartment with all required amenities in place is an artistic edifice. The structure is the administrative office and painting studio of his gallery.

Akinlolu, approaches his form in different media and technique depending on a particular assignment. He cast in fibre glass, fundu and also employed reinforced concrete technique. He wrought and also welds iron into shapes. His patrons are mainly from the wealthy Lagosians, Abuja and Port-Harcourt people. Some of them are: Otunba Tunde Onakoya (Tunde Debasco), Otunba Fatai Sowemimo, His Royal Highness Igwe Okorie M.N., Dr. Paul Warbaton of West African Cement. Others are; Sir Shina Peter and Prince Uche Nwole.

Akinlolu's works are spread across the country. He claimed he had made over two thousand eight hundred water fountain and falls across the cities of Nigeria. He is now buying houses, recreates and sells them again. He embarked on the idea when art patronage suddenly became low. Thus, he whimsically blends sculpture with architecture to make a livable environment. He declares: "Artist most repackage their product in a captivating manner that would prod money from the wallet of his clients". In the resent times, Akinlolu no longer produce any work by himself. He only supervises his staff (mostly Art graduates of Yaba College of Technology Lagos).



Plate 5

A statue made by Akinlonu.

Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2007

Tolu Filani: Tolu is a product of Yaba College of Technology (1980). He later studied art in the United States of America (Odiboh 1987:50). Thereafter, he became a lecturer in Yaba College of Technology, Lagos. Tolu has produced four outdoor sculptures located in different public environment in Lagos. His public outdoor sculptures are: *The Drummer* he made in 1983, two *statues of Herbert Macaulay*, one erected in Sabo Area, Macaulay Street, Lagos (plate 6) while another was erected in front of CMS Bookshop. He also made busts of some eminent personalities; one of whom is Chief Akin Olugbade of Owu Abeokuta. His latest work in Lagos was the *statue of Tai Solarin*, erected in the middle of the popular Yaba Market. He also made many outdoor sculptures for corporate organization such as; Merchant Bank PLC, Cowrie House Victoria Island, Lagos.

Tolu Filani expresses his forms in naturalism. His *Herbert Macaulay* at Sabo, Lagos was crisply cut inform, correspondingly to human anatomy. Tolu had Keen eye for minute details and mood. Expression of the images of individual he represented were often captured in vivid reality. For instance, the aristo-political class of Herbert Macaulay in the 1920s expressed by the artist stares its audience in the face momentarily. Further, in his conceptualization of the image of *Tai Solarin* that he produced in 2002 without any ambiguity, (plate 7) the strength of Tai Solarin's socialist ideology and the pre-independence school headmaster mannerism were painstakingly interred in the sculpture. His ability to represent deep inner thought, balanced subtly with physical character, separates Tolu from many other sculptors in the Southwest.



Plate 6

Tolu Filani. *Herbert Marculay*,
Fibre glass, height: 210cm, 1986
Herbert Macaulay Street, Sabo, Lagos.
Photograph by Moses Akintonde, 2007



Plate 7

Tolu Filani. *Tai Solarin*,
Fibre glass, height: 195cm, 2002
Yaba, Lagos.
Photograph by Sola Ogunfuwa, 2007

In terms of material handling, Tolu might be safely adjudged the most skillful in fibre cast technique among the artists of outdoor sculpture in the Southwestern Nigeria. The seam lines of his works were usually carefully handled, without leaving any trace of the joints. Poor handling of seams in other sculptors' works usually developed into big cracks and the eventual degeneration of works. Apart from maintaining good seam line, the uniform thickness of the walls of his work is also an advantage, against the irregular walls of other sculptors' works which are prone to cracks and tiers of fibre walls; most especially at the contours and joint areas. Tolu indept understanding of thematic manipulation, coupled with his deft naturalistic style, usually expressed in minute detailing, his high technical proficiency in choice of material and handling, probably makes him the most outstanding outdoor sculptor in the Southwest of Nigeria.

Akah Bunak: Bunak who hails from Delta State was a graduate of IMT Enugu. He served in Osun State during his National Youth Service in 1992. Within his one year stay in Osun State, he successfully made eight outdoor sculptures including a bust. The works are spread across Osogbo, Ede, Bode Osi and Iwo. His first work in the State, the *Unknown corper* was very successful, such that it endeared Bunak to the Director of NYSC in the State. With the Director's help, Bunak secured many outdoor sculpture commissions from Osun State Government, and few private individuals.

Akah Bunak's works were expressed in realism. However, he often pay little attention to treatment of finger nails. He might have rushed over the area he considered less seen because of too many works he had to finish within a short period of time. The size of Akah Bunak's works are not more than life size or slightly above. They have low textual surface and painted in Lampblack dry brush effect. Akintonde (2004: 14-26) observed that his works on traditional themes, such as *Sango-Timi* (plate 8) and *Timi Agbale Olofa'na* should have been massive in size to correspond with the super human nature of the individuals in the

Yoruba tradition. Chukka Nbufe his friend claimed that Akah Bunak returned to Delta State and engaged in full-time art practice after his service.



Plate 8

Akah Bunak, *Sango-Timi*, cement,

Height: 300cm, Okegada, Ede.

Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2004

Rasheed Esso: Rasheed, a native of Offa in Kwara State, was a 54 years old class teacher at Technical College Esie, in Kwara State between 1982 and 1990. He studied Art and Craft in Technical College Pategi, between 1973 and 1975. He later went to Idah Technical College and studied painting and decoration. In 1982, he obtained London City and Guide Advanced Certificate at Yaba Technical College.

Rasheed has remained the main producer of outdoor sculpture for the public places in Offa and the neighbouring towns since 1986 when he made his first statue- *Okin* (plate 9), which he donated to Offa community. He later made another five statues for the town. He received four commissions in Igosun, Rore and one other town in the area. All his works were made in reinforced concrete. Rasheed's forms are idealized realism in expression. His human forms are clumsy, characterized by exaggerated muscles represented only, like bumps, rather than a well studied human muscular structure. Hands and limbs are usually schematized, while eye, nose, lips and ears were mere representations. The surface textures of his works are smooth. Except the *Okin* image which is polychromatic in colours, Rasheed's other works are left in the natural colour of the medium he used. The themes of his works are traditional, despite his low skill they could be well comprehended in concept and content.



Plate 9

Rasheed Esso, *Okin* (Ostrich), cement, height: 75cm, Offa.

Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2004

Moses Akintonde: Moses is an indigene of Ile-Ife. Very early in life, he demonstrated great potential for art through numerous drawings and metal junks he usually assembled into creative forms. Since the early period his great-grand mother, Maria Omireopo, who also practiced dyeing, was a source of encouragement for his art development. Between 1977 and 1980 he went into art apprenticeship in Ile-Ife concurrently under Sule Asha, a product of Ori-Olokun workshop, Lamidi Oke, a traditional bronze caster and Ben Oluyemi an officer in the National Museum for Commission and Monument, who is a bronze caster, wood and stone carver. Moses later attended University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) where he had his Bachelor of Art Degree in Fine Art specializing in Ceramic (1984). In 1997 he obtained a Master of Art Degree in visual arts at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. He later obtained a Ph.D. degree in Art History at Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso in 2009. Akintonde lectured Fine-Art in Osun State College of Education Ila-Orangun, between 1985 and 1994; he has also been lecturing the course since 1994 in Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso. Akintonde has held many administrative positions which include head of Department of Fine and Applied Arts LAUTECH, Ogbomoso. He also participated in many exhibitions, workshops, seminars and symposia. He has also published many journal articles and co-authored some books.

His experience in the studio practice has produced twenty seven outdoor sculpture figures. The works are spread across Osun, Ekiti, Oyo and Kwara State. The larger numbers of the works are located in some towns in Osun State. A few samples of his works are: *Ajagunnla*, *Baba Onisekere* (plate 10), *Yeye Osun* and *Moremi*. His works are colossal and expressive. The prominent themes employed in his works are traditional, mostly based on Yoruba heroes and heroines and Yoruba anecdotes, sometimes conceptualized and expressed metaphorically. He usually sets figures in motion-making them to be dramatic (plate 10). His forms are clearly defined, and well textured with evenly distributed short horizontal strokes. Many of his works were made in fundu and reinforced concrete while few were made in polyester resin.



Plate 10

Akintonde Moses, *Baba Onisekere*,

Cement, height: 285cm, 1991,

Ayetoro Junction, Osogbo.

Photograph: Akintonde Moses, 2007

Tony Emordi: Tony did not produce many outdoor sculptures, however, his major work which was erected in front of Anti Natal Building, Ayinke House, Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Spot-light him as a good sculptor. Tony who hails from Agbor in Delta State was born in 1963. He attended Ahmadu Bello University Zaria in 1988 and obtained Master of Fine Art degree in 1997, specializing in sculpture. He worked as a fulltime studio artist between 1989 and 1999 before he was appointed as a lecturer in Yaba College of Technology, Lagos.

Tony lives in company of ten artists (sculptors and painters) who practice together. Oneness in practice really influenced their work positively, particularly, in concept formation. For instance, Tony recalled, whenever any member of the group received a commission, they all examined the work, gave suggestion on the concept and monitor the progress till completion. In this way their patrons always reap bountiful harvest of ten intellectuals input. He highlighted his contribution in the making of the statue of *Mobolaji Bank Anthony* (plate 11). The works was originally commissioned to two artists in their group, Nwadugu E. and Bane F.O. He said they all agreed to express the statue of *Bank Anthony* based on the nature of his work. Bank Anthony's profession being an undertaker was rated higher in concept formation than his famous philanthropic nature in the manner of posture the image was conceived and constructed. The mode of erection of the statue which is set against the light to form a silhouette is also in compromise with the scary nature of undertakers.

Tony's *Mother and child* (plate 12) at Ayinke House (beside expressway) expressed in realism aptly described his good understanding of human anatomy and emotion, which he carefully set in visual language, that is easily understood by the public. Tony gives great consideration to clean subtle lines for proper definition of forms. Every line he made is purposeful, particularly in the expression of draperies which are in super concordance with body movement.

In surface treatment, his short-juxtaposed horizontal strokes with proper definition between the soft complexion of human body and the fabric of the apparel of his figure are captivating to touch; very similar to Abayomi Barber's *Adesoji Aderemi* and *Muritala Mohammed*. Apart from his fibre glass work of *Mother and child*, his many other works were executed in bronze casting and expressed in abstract form. Although, a fatal accident he had about nine years ago confined him into wheel chair due to spinal cord injury he sustained, he has been very forceful in the spirit and hoped strongly to come back into studio practice again, whenever he fully recovers. In the main time, he has been writing on art, attending art seminars, symposia and workshops.



Plate 11

Nwadugu E. and Bane F. O.,
Mobolaji Bamk Anthony,
Cement, height: 210cm, 1989,
Lagos State Teaching Hospital Road,
Lagos.

Photograph: Akintonde Moses, 2007



Plate 12

Tony Emordi, *Mother and Child*,
Fibre glass, height: 150cm, 1991,
Ayike House, Lagos State Teaching Hospital,
Lagos.

Photograph: Ogunfuwa Sola, 2007

Adeola Balogun: Adeola, a native of Ota, Ogun State was born in 1966. He studied Fine Art, specializing in sculpture in Yaba College of Technology where he obtained Higher National Diploma Certificate in Fine Art in 1994. He also obtained a Master of Fine Art Degree in University of Benin in 2001. Adeola, presently lectures in Yaba College of Technology. He has held two solo and fifteen group exhibitions, Adeola has executed three major public outdoor sculpture figures including; *Awolowo* (plate 13) located at Allen Avenue as well as *Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun* and *Funso Williams* located in Ondo and Lagos respectively.

His style of expression-realism is robust; tracking down all details, conceivable in human anatomy and drapery formations. Good conceptualism and technical proficiency in works are paramount in his expressions. This is due to Adeola's acquaintance with the style of Tolu Filani who was his lecturer. Rukeme a painter and colleague of Adeola, observed

Tolu Filani's influence in his work and said; "Adeola's contribution in the production of *Tai Solarin* statue commissioned to Tolu Filani must have been very high, as it bore much of his characters in form than Tolu's



Plate 13

Adeola Balogun, *Obafemi Awolowo*,
Fibre glass, height: 240cm, 2002,
Allen Junction, Ikeja, Lagos.

Photograph by Akintonde Moses, 2007

Style." According to Rukeme, Tolu Filani, a student of Yusuff Grillo, similarly, was also said to have almost unilaterally executed Grillo's *Eyo Adamu Orisa* and some other works for Grillo.

Most of Adeola's works were expressed in welded metal abstract forms which are very vibrant, informative and instructive. His philosophy is the *Seed Phenomena*; which means whatever, you sow is what you will reap, and even more in proportion. These beliefs he pontificated, should reverberate in the mind of every artist and all Nigerians as means that could guide man to excellent contribution to humanity.

Conclusion

The emergence of public outdoor sculpture in Nigeria has in no doubt provided a platform for artistic engagement and challenge among the Nigeria contemporary artists. The preponderant use of outdoor sculpture for public environment, in the Southwestern part of the country has also afforded us, opportunity to appreciate and assess the capacities and capabilities of the outdoor sculpture artists; within the socio-context of Yoruba culture. But quite a large number of the artists are still anonymous. The artists' anonymity factor is a serious problem which inhibits good understanding of their works and possible tracking of their progress. That notwithstanding, some artists of the outdoor sculptures in the Southwestern Nigeria public environment have been identified. Their works are also well known. Some of the artists and samples of their works have provided an over view of the entire sculptures for examination through a biographical study. This study reveals

homogenous forms and similar treatment of texture expression among the sculptors of Southwest Nigeria. The forms of their works were rendered in realism. Only Abayomi Barber and Tolu Filani are the sculptors expressing forms in naturalism. Between 1980 and 1990, themes are mostly based on traditional religion personage, heroes and heroines. Themes expressed as from 1991 become more flexible, accommodating everyday life experience including commerce and sport, as reflected in product advertisement and figures on sport. Although individual styles in their works are quite obvious, there is yet no conscious forum where new stylistic developments are adopted. Because the Yoruba prefers readable forms and clarity of message in art, the prevailing realism style of expression were constantly used for the production of the public sculpture. Although many of the sculptors have displayed capacity for expression in abstraction, it is only used more for private works. Comprehensive individual stylistic development is a bit difficult to assess now, due to few number of works of many of the artists. In many cases, artist hardly has more than two or three works in the corpus. In this case, the same style of expression still subsist, except in few cases where another artist helped his master or acquaintance to execute sculpture project, that slight stylistic shift in the work of such artist is noticeable.

Conclusively, the contribution of each public sculpture artist to the development of contemporary art history of Nigeria cannot be measured. As the practice is becoming intensified in the early period of the new millennium, it is important to constantly study the development of the established artists and the upcoming artists. In this way, the development of the practice would become more comprehensible. Based on the fore-going, a comprehensive contemporary art history of the Southwest of Nigeria would be guaranteed to a large extent.

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