

ILLUMINATIONS THROUGH VISUAL SYMPHONY:AN ART EXHIBITION OF THE DELSU, (ABRAKA), GROUP OF ARTISTS

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Abstract

This paper assesses the 2011 art exhibition titled: Visual Symphony mounted by the Delta State University, Abraka group of artists at Quintessence Gallery, Lagos. It hinged the coming of the show and the group to the emergence of the studio art at the Ph.D (doctoral) level in the university's art department. And a long wait after 36 years of the emergence of the school of art right from her College of Education days. It talked on reasons for the show which it says goes beyond mere commercial issues. Some of the reasons adduced are: education, documentation, communication, entertainment, enlightenment, integrity, dignity, moral, historical, social, political and religious responsibilities. The Objective the paper believes is to link the fine art department with the development of the academic community (gown) and the larger society (town) where her products are applied. Significantly the exhibition supported and enhanced the role of visual art education in the promotion of social responsibility, academic and social cohesion, cultural diversity and intercultural dislodge within and outside the University. Others are capacity building for visual art training and education through research and leadership advocacy, and policy development processes. It developed both intra and interdisciplinary diverse visual arts education partnership among various stakeholders (culture, industry, education and commerce) and it has for the first time since her establishment 36 years ago open her door for public viewing of her products and her present ratings / rankings in the Nigerian Visual art community. The paper classified the critique along the different art genres / sections available in the department viz: Sculpture, painting, ceramics, textiles and graphics. Each of the artists work on show were properly discussed analysed and assessed based on the exploration of the historical and cultural context, subject matter, material, technique and also the different processes of production. This, the study observes help to peel off the layers of peripheral meanings that lie above the surface of the contextual presentation of the works. The study found out that the exhibitors (Lecturers and students) gave a good account of themselves which indirectly gave a high rating for the works on display and the school. Some of the works show extremely expansive philosophical scope while there exist stylistic diversity, multimedia and thematic variety. It indeed illustrates a synergy of intellectual prowess and professional dexterity which is a result from a reasoned understanding and relationship between the masters and apprentices.

Introduction

Crossover between the class/seminar room and the studio has been a conspicuous feature of advanced art of the Delta State University, School of Art over the last four years. The medium of exchange has been what is broadly termed “Philosophy of Theory and Practice” or better put in Osa Egonwa’s words “Practice –led Studio research”. The strong emergence of the studio art at the Ph.D level in the university’s art department did not in anyway water down the existing parallel development in the study of art history within the same period in the academy. The kind of erudition generated by wide ranging studio inquiry has been far more resistant to codification in ways that suggest immediate theoretical applications and rewards. If there was to be any transition between new forms of historical awareness and new moves in studio art, it would necessarily be more deliberate and complicated. For now in Nigeria, only a few schools of art can be said to have started to bridge the two pursuits at the advanced level of philosophy, and prominent within these schools is the Delta State University’ s Fine and Applied Arts Department, Abraka. Her accumulated body of work and recent exhibition of same titled “Visual Symphony” at the Quintessence Gallery, Lagos, Nigeria testifies to the potentials of serious studio inquiry to motivate persuasive work in the academy.

What is Art Exhibition?

Art exhibition goes beyond mere commercial issues. It has a moral dimension, which means there are overriding matters of education, documentation, communication, entertainment, enlightenment, integrity, dignity, moral, historical, social, political and religious responsibilities. Aside describing values for human survival and peace, visual art is equally a necessary ingredient for change, hope, inspiration and information. Therefore documenting and assessing visual arts especially at exhibitions in catalogue form has the power to communicate the continuum of life and the threads that link the past, present and future. Elsewhere (2011) I stated that art exhibition can be defined as a public display (publication) of artworks. It could be paintings, drawings, sculptures, metal works, crafts or textile as the case may be. It is also referred to as “art show” which brings around many artists, dealers, collectors and the press, thereby creating room for artworks to be seen, written about, assessed and discussed.

According to Arubayi (2011) in a foreword to 'Visual Symphony': an exhibition of the Abraka School of Art here under review;

Exhibitions to the artist are usually the final point of creative endeavours. Having conceptualized and manipulated materials by the adoption of a variety of techniques the form that emerges from the creative process is not concretized until it has had the input of the consumer. As a consequence, overtime, particularly since the 19th Century, exhibitions have become more common place. These events however, have largely been at individual levels; except occasionally when groups of individuals elect to hold a joint exhibition.

Grant (2000) opines that artists are not people who simply create art and then drift off into oblivion rather want their works to be seen and receive some sorts of reaction from those who see them. Therefore, for many artists, the quest for an exhibition is the primary goal due to the fame successful exhibition can bring to exhibiting artists. In the same development, art criticism is an essential ingredients for the growth of art practice, art theory and art history. Fruitful aesthetic consumption is realised in balanced art criticism.

In agreement with Grant's statement above, this study will undertake a critical assessment of some of the works of artists on display at the *visual symphony* art exhibition in order to create a further reaction (positive or negative) from anyone that do not have the opportunity of visiting the art exhibits on display but come in contact with this paper for its timeless quality before the vacation of the show, for it is time bound.

Visual Symphony (A Critique)

Visual Symphony, Egonwa (2011:9), states is an apt appellation for the works of art of many instruments, tools, media in three or more visual movements, by many artists – teachers/practitioners resident (permanently or temporarily) at the Delta State University, Abraka in Delta State, Nigeria. This interprets that it is a group exhibition which is the bringing together of two or more individuals in an exhibition under one umbrella and theme at a given place and time. The group, Ojie (2011:08), refers to as

illustrating a synergy of intellectual prowess and professional dexterity which is the result from a reasoned understanding and relationship between the master and the apprentice. One fair characteristics of this exhibition is that despite the synergy, understanding and relationship that exists between the masters and the apprentices, there is enough room for freedom of expression, materials, methods, forms and mediums. This, Ojie (2011:08), says “show liberty in tutelage.” It further corroborate Egonwa’s stance on the differences between ‘Art School’ and ‘School of Art.’ This exhibition basically towed the line of the School of Art which Egonwa (2007:36), says “have common objective to train artists and art teachers who have good knowledge of Western art in all or most of its options. As opposed to an Art School when a number of artists share the same technical or conceptual ideologies and produce works of the same style in which form and content are in tandem.

Be that as it may, one of the primary objectives of DELSU group of artists recent exhibition this paper believes, is to link her creativity with the development of the academic community (gown) where it is situated as a stakeholder and the larger society (town) where her products or inquiries are applied. It is a known fact that Art is central to the development of all facets in any given society. According to Azeez (2011:2), development is the act or process of producing or creating something new or more advanced. Simply put, development is about research growth and advancement. Art, he states further is a creative endeavour which most of the time brings out something new and unique. It is about possessing technical skill, critical and imaginative thinking, intuition and creative thinking, etc.

Significantly, the DELSU group of artists have through the *Visual Symphony* exhibition, supported and enhanced the role of visual art education in the promotion of social responsibility, academic and social cohesion, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue within and outside the University. It has built capacity for visual arts training and education through research and leadership advocacy and policy development processes. Also it has developed both intra and interdisciplinary diverse visual arts education partnership among various stakeholders and sectors from culture to industry and to education at large. It has for the first time since its establishment in 1976 (35 years ago) as a school of art, put an all encompassing visual arts exhibition of not only the different sections of the Fine and Applied Arts departments together but the

undergraduate, graduate classes particularly the new Ph.D (practice led studio research programme) and lecturers.

Quintessentially, this review will serve both as a catalyst to DELSU, school of arts development and as a gauge of the Fine and Applied Arts department's intention. Also, it will further deepen the present wide recognition enjoyed by the department as the first school of art to mount the highly rated, intellectualised, resourceful Ph.D practice-led studio programme in visual arts.

The Abraka School of Art

The Abraka School of Art started in 1976 with a certificate programme mounted at the defunct College of Education, Abraka for primary education Fine Arts. By 1979, it admitted students for the double major in Fine Arts. This time, Fine Arts paired with a number of other disciplines of study such as History, Religious Studies and English. In the same year, the college got affiliated with the University of Benin, and was approved for the Bachelors in Education programme which visual arts was one of the disciplines that got the nod. As a follow up Egonwa (2011:148), notes that:

“Barely a month before she turned out her first set of degree graduates in 1985, the college became a campus of the Bendel State University, Ekpoma with this, the Abraka art department becomes the first unique single art educators producing school in Nigeria.”

In 1992, the Delta State University was established and the Abraka campus of the defunct Bendel State University became the main campus of the new University. And a Fine and Applied Arts department was created and assigned to the faculty of Arts. A programme leading to the award of B.A (honours) degree in various specialisation areas including Painting, Sculpture, Graphics, Ceramics and Textile design was mounted. In 1996, the postgraduate programmes in the studio areas and in the art history commenced. In 2007/2008 session, the Abraka art department added yet another feather to her cap by being the first school of art in any Nigerian University to mount and successfully prosecute the Ph.D programmes in the studio disciplines. Thus, the department now offers higher level art training in both literary and studio arts courses; leading to the award of BA, BA-Ed, MA, MFA and Ph.D degrees in art history and studios.

Classification

In order to illuminate through this exhibition, this paper discusses, analyses, critics and assesses the visual art works on display. A noticeable feature of the works in the *Visual Symphony* exhibition portends the fact that the Abraka School of Art is not yet an ideology based school. There is no yet single idea or philosophy, techniques, materials, methods pursued by the exhibiting students-artists and lecturers. There is absolutely limitless freedom of creativity and expression. The exhibits represent each artist's individualism, personal statements and philosophies. However, the artists and their works share common technical skills, media and rules of art making peculiar of a school of art where basic art making principles and elements are thought. Characteristics of this show from the array of works on display are the urge and search for innovative approaches to studio art making. There is the evidence that there exists viable studio explorations of both conventional and non conventional materials, intra-disciplinary link of two or more genres, development of alternative ideas, techniques and the use of materials in newly considered ways. This, Egonwa (2011:09), avers are clear evidence of the influence of the scholastic/productive context under which the works emerged.

Works

In his works titled; *The Lion Was Ill...*, *Vision of House in Limbo*, *Country Home Nostalgia and Developing Story: Blackman*, Osa Egonwa went deeply philosophic and poetical situating his images in historical, social and geographic settings through the use of stylistic symbolism, motifs and sometimes nearly painted texts. The urgent need to communicate deep messages broke through in a precipitate series of visual statements submitted for the exhibition. His works were in tandem with the sweeping contemporary social changes and political issues of the period in which they were produced. Besides, they provide an extensive and helpful synopsis of the social-political context we found ourselves in Nigeria, nay, Africa. His masterly philosophic paintings appealed for "order" in our social political, cultural and general body polity, and the demand for a national cultural principle against corruption. For instance, *The Lion was Ill...* was actually the drama and shameful power struggle that came to the fore amongst our national political leaders and office holders when our erstwhile late President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar Adua had a

protracted illness that eventually led to his death. Despite the fact that the country's constitution is clear on who acts and takes decision on behalf of the president, some powers (cabal) felt a southerner, who was then his vice from the south-south region of the country cannot assume power because of a complex that the presidency of the country is their birthright. The life of the president of the federation that was supposed to be open and transparent became "blocked", "black", "dark", "misty and cloudy" which gave room for unwarranted rumours about the president's life until his death and even after. The rest is now history. Osa Egonwa expressive urge in his works for this show was so strong that traditional forms could not contain it, so he changed and bent them to his will. The rustic roughness of his paintings distinguished him fundamentally from other exhibiting painters in the exhibition. The Vincent Van Gogh-like brush stroke of Osa Egonwa makes him tendered less and less and seems not to be bothered on a professional cum commercial finish of his paintings; unlike his Lagos based counterpart who feels and stands on the point that finishing will earn him the required naira and kobo.

Tobenna's work is realistic no doubt but beyond the realism is the inspired metaphysical readings that anticipate a reinterpretation of him as an artist constantly extending his neo-spiritual, philosophical grasp of the underlying forces in nature. His work *multiple emotions*, oil on canvas did justice to the artistic spiritualist position in him. True to his religious background and influence as a practitioner of bhakti yoga (linking with the supreme Lord through devotional service) with the Hare Krishna movement, a vegetarian, a teetotaller and a celibate. In his works he exchanged the two poles of formal visual definition, the mimetic and the symbolist. This change was a return to the first principles in painting (realism) in an Abayomi Barbers style that Egonwa (2011^b:9) says teases one's imagination, as the viewer like the subject has, the foliage, physical wood, spiritual partner remembered experience, the sky or the expanse of green to meditate.

Sculptures in the Round

It is a common knowledge that sculpture exists in space, as we human do. Therefore, the total experience of a sculpture is the sum of its surfaces and profiles. Even when touching is not permitted, the tactile quality of sculpture is an important

dimension. In most cases, sculpture is experienced through the movement of the viewer. Exception exists though, in relief works. All the sculptures shown at this exhibition except the work of Onose Jude titled *“Militants on the March”* and *“GirlsGuild”* by Edewor are all “in-the-round” or “freestanding.” In other words, when the works of the masters in the persons of Abel Mac Diakparomre, Nelson Edewor, Bazunu Harrie Uvietobor and the graduate students; Njoku Kenneth and Nzekwe Philips were viewed, one receives impressions from each side as one move around the works. An interesting feature of the sculptures on display is the multi-dimensionality of the materials and techniques. From the mortar and direct modelling of Diakparomre to the modern synthetic plastics and pigment, mixed technique of Bazunu to the Bronze works of Edewor and Njoku, and the traditional wood of Njoku and Philips.



Diakporomre Abel, *We are All Linked*, Mortar, 2011

Diakparomre’s 2011 work titled *“We are All Linked”* executed in mortar; is a philosophical food for thought and technically sophisticated work. His visual language is so elementary simplified yet complicated. He did not take his viewer to any confused transfer of information through the use of the simple basic circle shapes that dominated his work. With a structural foundation of semi circle form, circular or ringed forms are built on it with a continuing process of each ring interwoven on each other forming an acrobat of rings. The curved form of the rings albeit have the same similarity. He

succeeded in building four of the interwoven rings together in a vertical position and finally capped it at the top with another semi circle/ arc-like form in the face-up position suggesting continuity. A black coloured partinated object with a tactile surface finish reminds one of the acrobatic displays of the Atilogwu dancers of the Igbo cultural performance of eastern Nigeria at the height of their performance creating a hyper physical fitness acrobatic display sensation.

Diakparomre in *"We are All Linked"* was able to show a creative and masterly use of cement for indoor sculptures whereas the material has for sometime in the plastic arts confined to outdoor or garden sculptures. One wished however that he takes the cement used for this work to a more modern and avant-garde material like aluminium, bronze or steel that has the element of elegance, durability, and performance beyond cement which its weight and life span are short and predictable.

In expressing his philosophical thought in an interview, Diakparomre says: "we are linked" is a visual expression of the relationship that exists in the human family in sculptural form. Different and divergent it may seem, but when considered in totality, we find that the human race is cyclically formatted; we are always brought back to where we started from. The rings in the form connote this and their chain-like rendering is intended to exemplify the linkage." Nelson Edewor's presentation in *Girl's League* (wood panels), *"Above all odds," Time to go, "Olorogun Abowoworo" and "Good Times Are Here"* all in bronze are confirmation of dexterity and mastership of his materials and style. *"Girl's League"*, is a three vertically displayed experimentation with varied unconventional techniques, such as collages, assemblages and "ready-mades" coloured aluminium metals on nature-shaped flat wood panels. The abstract tendencies seemed characterised by a greater opening up to emotion and narration, renewed by their relations with organic forms and in particular colour symbols and motifs. The multi-dimensionality of Edewor in experimenting and exploring other materials in sculpture is brought to bear in some of his other bronze works in visual symphony. The four other bronze works credited to him revealed his minimalist tendencies. The bronze presentations are "pine-piped figures" laced with actions which are quintessentially Edewor. The uniqueness of his style and forms in these works are not contestable. Each of these smaller bronze works is a part of a larger ambience of thought and feeling particularly in his Niger delta oil exploitation struggles. Nonetheless, its full

reverberation can be felt only in the memory of all the others. He stylistically created a related world of figures that expresses a state of feeling joy, agony, despair at once ephemeral and eternal, all belonging to the same timeless flux.

However, in another sense, each one is not a new and different figure, but the same one renewed, seen at another moment, possessed by another pine-piped sentiment. Though, at the same point an advantage because it makes Edewor's sculptures symbolic: each single work evokes the total world of his creation and by extension achieves its meaning by the evocation of the absent and unseen.

In a masterly display and manipulation of unconventional materials for sculpture, BazunuUvietebor's *Decision Makers* executed in plastics and pigment has a touch of modern sculptural avante-gardeism. Bazunu's success in *Decision Makers* stem from the use of material which are waste empty table water plastics possibly picked from the bins or litters around the environment. It is purely a case of "waste to wealth." Manipulating the plastics to behave to his forms, shapes and actions is uniquely sophisticated. In this work, Bazunu created a form of art and poetry that came very close to the life of traditional cultural activities even with wastes which is a manifestation of intellect and will. With the type of "resource control" caps on the head of the *decision makers* one may not need a fortune teller to foretell where these *decision makers* come from or domicile in Nigeria.

Njoku Kenneth, Nzekwe Philips who are majorly the wood hubbers at this exhibition are research students whose works are innovatively documentary. Their forms are explicitly narrative. This can be seen in *Ugonwa1*, *Ugonwall*, *Ebi* and *Wiwa* by Keneth, and *Amaka I* and *Amaka II* by Phillips. With the lyrics, rhythm and finish created on their subjects, one can vividly see the responsibility of the duo researchers in giving complete representations of their time, creating narratives that amplify and explain, thereby becoming "primitives of a new sensibility"; i.e. old act in a new order. Despite the closeness in their wood finish, they still display a non ideological, artistic militancy arising from the aim of conferring cognitive utility on the art of carving and involving it directly in the documentation of contemporary historic and social changes. Little wonder Philips informs that his art documents the constant movement and expressions of humanity in his environment which emanates in an attempt to proffer solutions to the problems of the society. Still in the nuances of the orchestra, Jude Onose according

to Egonwa (2011:10) has not forgotten the nightmarish March of militants who moved like ants but rejected the wisdom of the ants. Like Bazunu, he shifted his material search to the dump sites where plastic wastes of juices and other drinks are found. Onose as a researcher in his material usage cleverly challenged the ever growing consumption pattern of man in a developing society like our and his inability to recycle his wastes. He creates a march past of the empty plastic containers by mixing it with malleable copper wire of varying thickness and sizes. The “foot soldier ants” are connected together with the aid of the copper wire that serves as the imaginary legs, antenna and hands of the ‘ants’ turned militants. In a bid to create uniformity among the ‘militants’, Onose almost devalue his creative ant assembly to craft realm by painting the plastic containers in black oil colour that instantly gives a flaking notice. It probably could have been ideal conceptually and technically situated if he had left the plastic containers with their supposedly colourful printed wrappers which would have further indict the product manufacturers of environmental pollution. Aside from being visually colourful, it would perhaps take Onose’s work beyond the edge and place it on another plain of sculptural/mixed media definitions.

Other Paintings

When the painter concerns himself with representation of the physical world, he is faced with the necessity of indicating the third dimension on a two-dimensional surface; he must construct a system of form, colour, texture and line to suggest mass, space, surface and light which means it is an art of illusion. Above, applies to the works of Osa Egonwa, Kunle Adeyemi, Emeni Onyema, Esimike Uchebuike, Imafidon Evans, Okwuosa Tobenna, Sukanthy Egharevba, Lawal Ibrahim and also the prints of Aganbi P. Jay, Odokuma Ese and Chika Thankgod. Emeni Onyema in his five presentations which are negritude *unfolding, nawaa, Ejiro V, Ogogorro Faces* and *Kakaki* shows the display of a colourist and experimentalist.

Introducing Visual Symphony, Egonwa (2011^b:09), avers;

that the practitioner- based ideology of the newly introduced studio Art degree at the doctoral level has fired in the students and staff a continued urge to search for innovative approaches to studio art practice. They have thus traversed the domains of

science, technology and myth to source the morphology of their other worldly objectifications.

In the search for innovative approaches and influence in the studio, Emeni and Ese Odokuma championed a practical private studio workshop sessions at the Nelson Edewor studio that has as participants Emeni Onyema, Nelson Edewor, Ese Odokuma and Kunle Adeyemi. This practice-led studio workshop sessions paved way for influence of masters and apprentices and vice-versa. It therefore brought to the fore, Egonwa's (2011:09) statement which says;

some of the pieces on display may almost be misauthenticated as some masters may manifest diverse and strange presentational tendencies such as Emeni's paintograph. Still others may be hard to pin down to one tendency. These are clear evidence of the influence of the scholastic/ productive context under which the works emerged.

Emeni in his paintograph painting titled *Negritude Unfolding* created a semi abstract work of two female figures superimposed on each other on a tactile recess, relief and plain ground with the dominant one showing a serigated half nude posture while the other at the foreground displayed an African adornment. Emeni in this work changed direction and had a complete break up from old ties. All his paintings attached prominence to figures and actions. "*Kakaki*, a 2007 oil on canvas painting with three main figures covering almost the entire surface of the ground had the images playing the local flute and trumpet (*Kakaki*). A colourful work dominated by linear brush work. The brush lines almost assume a geographic contour map situation and with a symbolist approach, the outlines gave visibility to the three musicians. The beauty of this work is that the lines flows in the direction of the forms and shapes available (horizontal, vertical, cyclical, diagonal) etc. The challenge Emeni's work has is the fact that all his presentations aside from "*Negritude Unfolding*" which is a 2010 work, others are showing dates of four and five years backward before this 2011 *Visual Symphony* exhibition under review. The punctuation in his studio production before the 2010 studio work is not too technically healthy for not only a practicing artist but an art teacher who gives direction to upcoming generation.

The paintings of Esimike Uche and Imafidon Evans belong to the same impressionist tendencies. They, like the impressionists were untheoretical and so act on the independence of art from nature. They exhibited freedom in the application of their brush strokes. However, Evans seems to be more fierce and confident in his brush work than Uche who still exercises some restraints in his colour application. He possibly do not want to take much risk and so his brushwork seems calculated. Uche's defect is his inability to divorce himself from the use of photographic references. He works within the confines and dictates of what his photographic references has to offer. This, if not checked may place his work in a permanent transition stage that may translate Uche's artistic production to crafts domain. Despite the pedestrianism in Evan's subject matter, his paintings moved away from naturalism towards a creative work that has the characteristics of continuity with states of inner feeling.

Kunle Adeyemi's offering of *Facial Foyer 1, Facial Foyer II, Paraphernalia of Royalty* and *Female Form VI* are quite experimental and exploratory. Equally at the exploratory domain is Sukanthy Egharevba's presentation of *Cross Culture, a Search for Fertility* and *The Way We Are* which Egonwa (2011:09) describes

as the formica images of Sri-Lanka in Tiv environments that celebrate technological / scientific breakthrough in expanding the materials for art. This, he states further are works bound together by intra / interdisciplinary of exploration. Techniques in one genre are transliterated on another in Adeyemi's paintograph and paintocast in a bid to give new face to good old easel painting.

Kunle Adeyemi's female form IV, Egonwa interpretatively and philosophically notes is,

Colourfully naked, expensive but cheaply made available even for those who do not want! He makes a strong protest statement that should be food for thought for organised female bodies to address!

He therefore relates it properly to our young ladies as to what should be beautified and exposed which he referred to as centres of public feminine beauty – the hair-do, the face, the disciplined and responsible dress culture, and its expression as at when due and not the near-naked backside, breasts, tights or the "privacies" as presently exhibited by Nigerian ladies mimicking their counterpart from the west. In the paintocast and assemblage painting titled *Female Form IV*; Kunle Adeyemi went beyond naturalist accuracy accepting the logic of painting and its growth as colour harmony. The painting minimises optical contrast and allows a single hue of deep sienna / umber to act as dominant colour. He fails to transcribe "nature" objectively. The dominant image in the picture (the female torso) is simplified with lessening of perspective details and lines giving emphasis to rhythm purification. One weakness common to both Kunle and Sukanthy is the tendency of overwork on their paintings. A close look at their compositions present many subject matters in one paintings. The overwork tendency stems from their consistent use of symbols, motifs, patterns and sign as a major drive of their composition. A major disadvantage in this is that their work may be oversubscribed by these elements if not well composed from the conceptual stage. This may in turn water down the messages and meaning in their works. Sukanthy's *cross culture* is a successful and colourful use of Perspex (plastics) cut to shapes and sizes to form the composition of five beautiful ladies on a horizontal row. Each displays the beauty on their faces and apparels. The deep umber brown colour at the background contrast sharply with the



SukanthyEgharevba, Cross Culture, Mixed Media, 2010

bright yellows, reds, blues, gold and peach cream colours of the plastics. It is noteworthy to say that Sukanthy's draughtsmanship flows with the forms created by her nature Sri-Lanka images. The undergraduate student painter, Lawal is an artist to watch because of

the potential he carries. Young Lawal, a 200level student of the University has through this exhibition chosen a focus on his future plans and development as far as visual art professional practice is concerned. His is a case of apt and timely talent discovery. According to the curators of this exhibition, he was discovered when he amongst other two students at his level put up a group exhibition in the department. His inclusion in the exhibition is a testimony to the fact that the department projects into the future by seeking visibility for her products in the art market place. Egonwa observes that; Lawal's entry; the teenage mother, is philosophical by crook or by hook. The mother is not physically female. Is the 'mother' so by the forced role thrown at the male spouse by an absconded female teenage mother? This is a food for thought!

Visual symphony as a public display presented its uniqueness and influence in all the arts on show. The graphic designers, printmakers, textile designers and ceramists have influenced the plastic artists and vice-versa. We are exposed to a show that has borrowed heavily from each other. For instance, Chika Thankgod made visual statements with her illustrations influenced by styles found in local clip arts for advertising and graphic design purposes. The simplicity of her clip arts design in a work titled; *Mama Akara, Oba of Benin* and *Things That Bind us Together* are not in doubt. However, the visibility in the complex nature of her design in each clip art work or illustration on show is glaringly noticeable. Her works, comports with the ideals and goals of visual communication which is to communicate messages to its audience successfully through the organisation of images and words. Her presentation at the visual symphony show focused on the Royal Oba's dress culture, kitchen/food preparation culture and a traditional home grown gift item that is acceptable to all cultures in Nigeria. In these illustrations, Chika has been able to manipulate the computer perfectly well to revolutionised her clip art world. She, probably through this will develop, explore and stimulate all facets of creative designs to innovate new vistas in her local clip-art world. All that she needed to do in her illustrations is to do more studies and harmonise her colour work properly so as not to have isolated colour block syndrome. In her work titled; *"Things That Bind us Together"*, the warm red/deep hue of the kolanuts were just floating without casting any colour harmony over the green leaf platform. Not even any of these cast any colour on either the background or foreground.

Another graphic studio researcher that had a fair presentation at the show is P. Jay Aganbi. His offerings titled; *“Waiting in Vain, Aids is Real, DELSU: A Panoramic View, Concepts for African International Conference poster and Evil for Money (print) are evidence of good, computer aided and articulately consumer or commission focused productions. In his words, Aganbi confirms that graphic design products are majorly targeted at products that depend on the public for consumption. A practicing advertiser that has now brought his long years of experience to bear on academics; the typefaces in his poster designs and fliers are distinctively legible with graphic colour structure that is limited to cyan, magenta, yellow and black (CMYK), Aganbi still manoeuvres to expose some other attractive warm and cool colours on his palette through the use of different pantonic hues. He uses this very well for the attraction advantage of some of his works for public display. A noticeable identity in Aganbi’s work is his constant use of computer generated African signs, symbols and motifs that is often his creation. Though, this has not gone beyond the use of vertical and horizontal lines, circles and triangles which he stylishly combines. It could go beyond this level and become more indigenous if he really would take his time to compose and make statement with these interesting local symbols, motifs and patterns that are multifariously available.*

Ese Odokuma, one of the lecturers in the department is a promising printmaker. Her 2011 piece, *“Controlled Aggression”* is a relief mixed media technique which has as synthesis the genres of sculpture, painting and printmaking. Her creative inputs in the works presented for this show confirms Egonwa’s (2011:10) claims that; *“as an Africanist art historian, she has not forgotten her beginnings as first and foremost an artist before delving into art history. There is also an attempt by Odokuma to de-dimension sculpture by choosing relief instead of the conventional sculpture in the round.”* Odokuma in *“Controlled Aggression”* is able to unify her composition with an unbroken line just like the swirling line. The movement of her lines twist and turn in different directions and even at different speed. Her work has the elements of gestural application of paint just like the *“action paintings”* of Jackson Pollock and Willem Dekooning. The aggression in the work as shown by the swirling lines created a potency and intensity of an inevitable tension between the idea and its necessary approximate material embodiment. However, Odokuma has not found her feet in the use of materials which makes her work undisciplined and unpredictable. Her controlled

aggression spills out in a yet to be crystallised mineral prodigality. It is lavish in a way, no doubt but seemingly untidy.

Ceramics

Visual Symphony as an orchestra of sorts according to Egonwa (2011:09), has the cross currents of the scientific and the humanistic. These apply to both the ceramics and textile arts on display. The creative experiments in ceramics and textile centre on defining new functions for products while exploring limited facilities for cottage art practice. The ceramics and textile works of Grace Ojie; Abamwa, Oghenekevwe; Egede, Stephen; Ekong Clement; Okpu, Oghale; and Edo, Patience gave a good account of the applied arts aspects of the orchestra. While Ojie, Abamwa and Egede presented glazed pots and wares, Ekong showed some objects of baked clay and few glazed stonewares. Grace Ojie's and Abamwa's offerings of *"Looking up to God, A Romance with Technology, The Way it Used to be and Securing the Treasury, Awhekoko Vase, Edjere Book end, Awhorurhe Vase, Akpere pot and Ogriki pot* are finely masterly crafted glazed ceramics pieces all in the characteristic of pottery finish. These works particularly *Securing the Treasury and Ogriki pot* by Ojie and Abamwa respectively are objects of total adoration. At first encounter at these objects, one may not believe that one is gazing at a hand crafted



Ekong Clement, Armament: By Who and for Whom?, Glazed Stoneware, 1999

but a digital machine finished vase and pots. The ceramic works not only have concern for form and content but for process and materials. They perfected their work to the level where the art and craft of ceramics became intermingled. Ojie, Ekong and Egede's presentations are so innovative to the extent of succeeding in challenging the distinctions between sculptures made of stone, clay or fibre. They have intentionally bridged the imaginary art/craft line as an open continuum, one in which the artist's intention is more important than his or her choice of technique and materials. From the ceramic works on display, one can see that Ojie, Abamwa, Egede and Ekong fell within the category of artists who use craft media to make one-of-a-kind objects of artistic merit, regardless of sales potential. In his assessments Egonwa (2011:10), describes; Clement Ekong's "Armament: By Who and for Whom"

as a work that poses a universal peace question, as his formal choice asks complex compositional questions testing the visual literacy and aesthetic sensibility of the viewer. On Abanwa'a Oghriki pot, he says; is mystical as Oghriki is a sacred shrub famous for alters, groves and boundaries while Egede in his work bemoans the economic meltdown as the pot of treasury is eroded from the leaders (top), NgoziOjie's is bent on securing the treasury. This work by deductive reasoning seems to suggest the partially known function of an ancient-Igbo-Ukwu Roped-pot-to secure, power, wealth or health.

Generally speaking, all the ceramic artists in this show through their works have led the way to inventive design and innovative use of materials which interestingly has given room for new freedom, allowing them to create objects without concern for quality, economy and practicality.

Textile Arts

Still in the domain of technology and myth to source the morphology of their other-worldly objectifications, the duo textile artists of Oghale Okpu and Edo, Patience Akpojena had their woven fabric with tapestry designs and print on fabric mediums

respectively. Presentations by Okpu are; *Ladies Pride, The Gentleman, Modern Man, Bright Day and Traditional Upliftment* in woven fabric with tapestry while Edo had; *Beatfor Peace, Honour the Culture, Surplus, Art Drives the Files and Cultural Gift* in print on fabric medium. Their works are in the fibre art category which includes such processes as weaving (both loom and non-loom techniques), stitching, surface design (dyed and printed textiles) particularly wearable art. The duo has both used natural and synthetic fibres in



OkpuOghale, Traditional Upliftment, Woven Fabric with Tapestry Designs, 2010

both traditional and innovative ways. They draw on the heritage of traditional practices and also explore new avenues of expression. Okpu's woven and sewn *danshiki* design is based on the interlacing of lengthwise fibres (warp) and the cross fibres (weft). She creates her patterns by changing the numbers and placements of interwoven threads. This complex weaves and sophisticated block-like colour juxtaposition is produced with the simple hand loom. The contrasting strips of deep purple, emerald pale green and light purple hue in "*Traditional Upliftment*" giving an illusion of light and dark, warm and cool colours flow in an inventive rhythmic pattern. The quilt has an exceptionally rich surface. Edo Patience in her print work is concerned with making and selling wearable art. She, however, created an intriguing interplay of textures, patterns, shapes and colours. She is of the opinion that materials and techniques are instruments of

communication, not ends in themselves and concerns that creating her textiles is to avoid a total extinction of creative tie, dye and printed fabric. She equally thinks of making a vigorous and dynamic contribution to the Nigerian textile cultural and developmental milieu. Major things Edo needs to watch in her works are technical finish, balance in composition and over subscription of her subject matter. Despite the fact that she is in the academic environment, Edo favours the craft aspects of textiles.

In conclusion, Visual Symphony as an art exhibition in 2011 remains an indelible show-piece which cannot be forgotten so soon generally among the art stakeholders in Nigeria, and Lagos in particular. The visibility given the show by both the print and electronic media raised a viability dust that is highly rated. Equally, the gallery manager to the exhibition confirms that the visitors to visual symphony show remains the largest so far recorded and guests at the opening, the most populated in 2011. Comments from visitors to the exhibition in the guests register gives a very high rating for the art on display, the artists and the school for a job well done. Lagos art critics were surprised and held spell bound because of the high standard of works from the AbrakaSchool that were shown. Indeed the exhibits showcased illustrate a synergy of intellectual prowess and professional dexterity which can only be result from a reasoned understanding and relationship between the master and the apprentice. In the words of Ojie (2011:08),

One very important issue in this exhibition is that, in spite of the synergy that normally would exist between the “master” and the “apprentice”, the exhibits show a liberty in tutelage for which the Universities are known. The doctorate degree in studio art of the Delta State University is a practice-led programme in which materials, techniques/technologies and other production-induced ideologies take a centre stage. It envisages that the participatory knowledge of research students as accomplished studio masters in aspects of studio art would make them better artists and philosophers on how the “Art Act” can be carried out. Indeed, professionalism in the studio is, by this process, more entrenched. This exhibition, therefore, attempts to show that a Ph.D degree in the studio does not detract nor diminish professional competence in practice. If anything, it invigorates

*professional competence by the intercourse that comes into existence
when academic intellectuality is married to creative prowess.*

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