

A Short History of Landscape Painting In Lagos State, Nigeria: 1900 - 2014

*Ajiboye O. J. (Ph.D.), Okunade M. A.

Department of Fine and Applied Arts Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Corresponding Author: Ajiboye O. J.

Abstract: The history of landscape painting in Nigeria art is still at a developmental stage. This paper therefore chronicles the history of landscaping painting in Lagos State. It specifically examines records of landscape paintings with a view to providing a brief history of landscape painting in Lagos, Nigeria. Data for the study is derived from literature and field study. The paper reveals that the art of landscape painting in Lagos State is very vibrant and its history can be classified into historical epochs. The paper concludes that there is the need for proper art historical study of landscape painting in Nigeria generally and particularly Lagos State towards enhancing Nigeria's name in the world art history.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The history of landscape painting in Nigeria can be gleaned from available literature on modern Nigerian art. As noted by Osborne (1970: 638), Fleming (1980: 488), and Delahunt (1996), definitions of landscape painting commonly centre on nature. However, Myers (1969: 373) added that it may be "topographical landscapes in which a real section of a country is represented" or "pure landscapes (without figures) or a type in which figures play a secondary role". The term 'landscape' is of Dutch origin (landscap or landschap) dating back to the 16th century (Osborne, 1970: 638). With the introduction of easel painting to Nigeria in the twentieth century, through Aina Onabolu, landscape painting has become common a common phenomenon (Okeke, 1982). Unfortunately, landscape painting in Nigeria and in Lagos State, where the art can be considered to be at the highest level, has not received enough academic attention. Thus, this paper provides a short historical view of landscape painting in Lagos State.

Landscape Painting in Nigeria: A Review of Literature

Few literature mention landscape painting in modern Nigerian art. An early example is Danford (1950) accompanied with pictures of landscape paintings (taken from the 1948 Nigerian Art Exhibition) and captions which confirm that Adeyemi Adenuga, E. Okaybulu and D. Ebanda have painted landscapes as early as the 1940s. Other literature with information on landscape painting in Nigeria are Beier (1960), Chukueggu (1998), Filani (2005), Konate (2008), Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009: 11), Bosah and Edozie (2010), Okunlola (2010), Egonwa (2011) and Castellote (2012) which only provides pictorial evidence. All the above literature can only offer information on landscape painting in Nigeria as side comments which are not enough to be considered as any historical study of landscape painting in Lagos State.

More focused studies are Ajiboye (2005) which is based on three Nigerian landscape painters and Ajiboye and Makinde (2011) which studied the influence of the Lagos City environment and experience on ten selected landscape painters. These studies only constitute a microcosm of the history of landscape painting in Lagos State. However, a more direct study by Ajiboye and Fajuyigbe (2015) studies the early history of landscape painting in Nigeria in the context of modern Nigerian art leaving out details on the developments from 1970 till date in Lagos State. In recent times, the development of landscape painting in Lagos State reveals that there has been much progressive development in the art of landscape painting in the State. It however requires a detailed art historical study with focus on the history of landscape painting in Lagos state from 1900 to 2014, since Lagos State is the hub of artistic activities in Nigeria.

The Beginning of Landscape Painting in Nigeria

The beginning of modern Nigerian art could be traced to the exploits of Aina Onabolu in modern easel painting which dates back to the pre-independent Nigeria; precisely the 1900s in the then Lagos Colony which later metamorphosed into Lagos State (Onabolu, 1963: 295; Babalola, 2004:17; Oloidi, 2011:20). Literature

show that landscape painting in Nigeria is traceable to the practice of Aina Onabolu who painted landscapes during his career which was based in Lagos (Onabolu, 1963:295; Ojo, 2002:2; Babalola, 2004:28).

Lagos State is usually considered as an artistic key point in modern Nigerian art, both in the practice and history of art (Oyelola, 1998: 21; Ochigbo, 2006: 281; Spiesse, 2003: 76; Babalola, 1995: 8; Filani, 2005: 26; Okeke-Agulu, 2011: 13). The most popular names in landscape painting are resident in Lagos State where they practice and have become well known (Okediji, 2012: 34). The foundation for the development of Fine Art in the history of Nigerian education was laid in Lagos State by Aina Onabolu who happens to be the first landscape painter recorded in the history of modern Nigerian art. Therefore, Lagos State is a very significant starting point in the history of landscape painting in Nigeria.

History of Landscape Painting in Lagos State: An Overview

Some observations which point to some trends can be made from the development in landscape painting in Lagos State. These observations clearly suggest periodic classifications for the history of landscape painting in Lagos State using the October 1960 Nigerian independence as periodic landmark. The classification are:

- a. Pre-independence to 1900 - 1969: the years of inspiration;
- b. Post-independence, 1970 – 1999: the years of incubation and establishment; and
- c. Post-independence, 2000 – 2014: the years of the new breed.

Pre-independence 1900 - 1969: Years of Inspiration

Aina Onabolu's early practice implies that the beginning of landscape painting in Lagos State predates the creation of the State. According to Tijani (1999:7), what was politically in existence then was the Lagos Colony as it emerged in 1861 after the abdication of Oba Dosumu. The Lagos Colony and Protectorates as it was then known was part of the Western Region until the agitation for self-government which began in 1956. Lagos State was created by the States Creation and Provisions Decree No. 14, May 27 of 1967.

The pictures of 1948 on Nigerian art exhibition which illustrate the article on Nigerian art by Danford (1950: 157-158) reveal paintings from Adeyemi Adenuga who painted "Oyo-Agunpopo Hill"; E. Okaybuluwho drew "A Creek Scene"; D. Ebanda who painted "Near Ibadan" and Albert Odunsiwho painted "Going to the Market" among many other participating artists. Asobele (1992:8) also corroborates the creative expressionisms above.

By 1940, Akinola Lasekan (1916 – 1972) has become acknowledged as a landscape painter, market scenes specialist and cartoonist (Oloidi, 1995:194; Adesanya, 2008:7; Asobele, 1992:5). Ben Enwonwu (1921-1994) also painted landscapes which were "naturalistic, and smoothly executed in rich colours". The landscapes "appeal to wide public and are his most popular work with most Nigerians" (Beier, 1960: 10). Examples of Ben Enwonwu's landscapes are "Jungle Landscape" (1943) and "Cotton Trees" (1949).

The paintings of another pioneer in landscape painting is Chuks Anyanwu (1937 – 1980) whose landscape paintings can be viewed in the collection of The Hour Glass Gallery, Lagos. Typical of Chuks Anyanwu are "Landscape 1" which displays the artist's compositional ability in landscape painting and "Landscape 2" (Plate I), a simple landscape painting. Anyanwu's foliage seems to be achieved with the same style of brush movement and impression that suggests an almost schematised manner of foliage rendering; a mannerism that pervades his landscape paintings.



Plate 1: Chuks Anyanwu, *Landscape 2*, oil on board, 20 x 12 inches, 1967. Source: The Hour Glass Gallery, <http://www.hourglassgallery.com/artist-category/chuks-anyanwu/>

Considering the few records and landscapes still available, these group of painters; Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Ben Enwouwu, Adeyemi Adenuga, Albert Odunsi, E. Okaybulu and D. Ebanda can be considered the precursors of landscape painting in modern Nigerian art. However, we cannot totally overlook the possibility of unrecorded landscape painters due to inadequate art historical records. Their works show that landscape painting in Nigeria has reached a high standard before Nigeria's independence as reproductions of landscapes by these precursors have shown.

The independence was like a tonic for creative outbursts and intellectual introspection into the indigenous artistic background of Nigerian artists who became more aware of their own richness embedded in their roots. These awareness thus culminated in the theory of natural synthesis which occupied the 1960s (Okeke, 1975:35; Babalola, 2004:22). The theory in its practicality shows disregard for the scientific cum objective accuracy of naturalism as preached by western art education which Aina Onabolu professed. The occupation of the 1960s with ideologies of indigenous introspection did not leave out the Lagos Colony; probably the reason why landscape painting did not find much favour in the expressions of painters like Jimoh Akolo, Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onabrakpeya, Erhabor Emokpae (1934-1984) and many others who graduated from the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos and the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the 50s and 60s. Many of such artists had their practice budded in what was to become known as Lagos State and became reputable names in the history of modern Nigerian painting. After the demise of Aina Onabolu in 1963, landscape painting continued to survive on the canvases of painters like Akinola Lasekan, Ben Enwonwu and Chucks Anyanwu as attested to by Kolade Oshinowo who launched into landscape painting in the 1970s (personal communication; December, 2015).

Post-independence, 1970 - 1999: Years of Incubation and Establishment

This period is important to the history of landscape painting in Lagos because it produced successors to the pioneers of landscape painting in Lagos State; the likes of Joshua Akande, Emmanuel Bojerenu, Kolade Oshinowo, Rauf Thompson, Abayomi Barber and Josy Ajiboye. Some of these successors became formal and informal art teachers. Kolade Oshinowo became a lecturer in the prestigious Yaba College of Technology where he retired and Dele Jegede taught briefly in the same school before moving to the United States where he taught in various schools such as Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, Spelman College, Atlanta, and Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Abayomi Barber taught through his informal Abayomi Barber School which started at the University of Lagos, Lagos in 1971; Abiodun Olaku gave tutelage and training to many painters through industrial attachments at the Universal Studios of Art, while Joshua Akande offered his service at the secondary school level. Josy Ajiboye also trained many commercial artists and painters from his studio in Mushin, Lagos.

The 1970s actually witnessed the establishment of more private galleries in addition to those founded in the 60s, examples are, Mbari Mbayo Gallery owned by Omotayo Aiyegbusi and Idubor Gallery owned by Felix Idubor. The new 1970 arrival, Gong Gallery owned by Emily Aig-Imoukhuede (Asobele, 1992:23; Ikpakuronyi, 2008:4) became a popular meeting point for artists like Kolade Oshinowo, Dele Jegede, Joshua Akande, Josy Ajiboye and Abayomi Barber and many more. All these artists had solo exhibitions which included landscapes at several times in the Gong Gallery (personal communication, with Josy Ajiboye, March 2014). These artists were later to become key names in the history of modern Nigeria art.

Abayomi Barber has become known for his surrealist landscape paintings in which humans, animals and vegetation become mingled and transposed in creative transformations. An example is the 'Greener Pasture' (2006, Plate 2). Josy Ajiboye painted common scenes from nature in his series of landscape paintings that focus on wildlife (particularly elephants and antelopes), mushrooms, giant trees with dramatic forms and anthills such as, 'Baobab' African Tree' (2007, Plate 3). Painters like Emmanuel Bojerenu, Joshua Akande, Kolade Oshinowo and Dele Jegede became known for painting urban and rural scenes of Lagos and its environs.



Plate 2. Abayomi Barber, *Greener Pasture*, oil on canvas, 160 x 280cm, 2006.
Source: Catalogue, *Dance of the Mind*, Mydrim Gallery.



Plate 3. JosyAjiboye, *Baobab, African Tree*, oil on board, 31 x 42inches, 2007.
Source: JosyAjiboye.

One of the earliest landscape series focused on scenes from Lagos State was done by the Ahmadu Bello University trained Joshua Akande who painted several landscapes inspired by Zaria and some Lagos suburbs in his impressionistic style, an example is “Habour at moonlight” and *Isheri Pond* (Plate 4). The 1973 Yaba College of Technology trained Emmanuel Bojerenu painted the “Waterside I” among others. KoladeOshinowo, a 1972 graduate of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria adapted textures and charcoal lines to his restricted palette of earth coloured naturalistic landscapes. He later became popular with series of art that depict scenes from rural life in Yoruba towns. The series culminated in the exhibition titled *Rural Reflections* in 1989.



Plate 4. Joshua Akande. *Isheri Pond*, oil on canvas, 91 x 122cm, 1977.
Source: *The Nucleus*, National Gallery of Art, Lagos.

Rural Reflections by Kolade Oshinowo in 1989 would probably be one of the earliest instances that landscape paintings of rural Lagos will partly constitute the contents of a documented exhibition focused on the socio-economic well-being of people living in the rural areas of Nigeria. This is a way of infusing issue based themes into the landscape paintings focused on Lagos State. This trend was to have a follow-up in Dele Jegede's *Eko Re e* in 1991. Oshinowo's influence on the Fine Art Department of Yaba College of Technology and the painting graduates Abiodun Olaku and Omolara Ige-Jacks has been well acknowledged (Irokanulo and Ndubuisi, 2008: 108). By the end of the 1970s, it has become clear that landscape painting in modern Nigerian art is sure to grow.

The 1980s witnessed the Nigerian art scene swelling with more art graduates. Many artists survived as teachers, lecturers and commercial artists taking graphics and advertising engagements. Abiodun Olaku and Toni Okujeni are notable landscape painters among the few artists who ventured into the world of studio practice in the 1980s while Sam Ovrati launched his creative landscapes in watercolour and oil. Though the 1980s witnessed economic recession, Toni Okujeni reveals that the late 1980s and early 1990s was the period that finance houses patronised art and many private collectors arose (Sowole, 2014:32). The 1980s also witnessed the emergence of the Yaba trained painters who depicted "the peculiarly busy environment and dynamic daily activities in Lagos" (Filani, 2005:26).

By the end of the 1990s; Abiodun Olaku, Lara Ige-Jacks, Oyerinde Olotu, Segun Adejumo, Kehinde Sanwo, Sam Ovrati, Zinno Orara, Mike Omoighe, Alex Shyngle among others have made their statements in landscape painting. Among them, Abiodun Olaku stands out as one of the most consistent and specialised, an example of his landscape is "Grey Tunes", (Plate 5). Kehinde Sanwo became identified with landscapes focused on old architecture, Lagos environments and the south western states in Nigeria; an example of his work is 'Afternoon Frenzy'. By the late 1990s, painters like Oluwafemi Otoki and Emenike Ogwo made their statements in photo-realism and impasto-clad expressionism respectively.

The 1970 entrants in the landscape art continued to entrench their positions in modern Nigerian art. However, towards the year 2000, certain themes became common in the landscape paintings in Lagos; environmental neglect, commercial activities and motor-parks. Individual styles also became well established. Oshinowo uses earth colours and sometimes charcoal lines while, Akande became known with some forms of stylisations using basic shapes to divide the canvas into several places, he introduces some forms of abstraction, dividing his paintings to basic shapes with brilliant colours. Josy Ajiboye's style remains romantic naturalism; his works tend to idealize ordinary scenes of nature.



Plate 5. Abiodun Olaku, *Grey Tunes*, oil on canvas, 95 x 110cm, 2005. This is a landscape painting based on Okobaba, a settlement of loggers and wood merchants.
Source: www.abiodunolaku.com

Post-independence, 2000 – 2014: Years of the New Breed

The first decade of the 21st century saw the Lagos art scene becoming vibrant with landscape painters from different art schools in Nigeria. The fold has continued to grow till the year 2014 when names like Olojo Kazeem, Olufemi Otoki, Damola Adepoju, Akintunde John, Taiwo George-Taylor, Chika Idu, Ola Balogun, Seye Morakinyo, Jonahan Jefferson, Dotun Alabi, Mufutau Apooyin, Titus Agbara, Bimbo Adenugba, Joseph Ayelero, Olajide Salako, Olufemi Oyewole, Olusegun Oduyele, Seye Morakinyo, Wilson Okonye-Dixon and some others that cannot be covered here began to make strong statements in the art of landscape painting in Lagos.

Majority of these landscape painters have mostly depicted scenes from Lagos. Painters like Oyerinde Olotu, Emenike Ogwo, Damola Adepoju and the diaspora artist, Gbenga Orimoloye have actually focused their solo exhibitions on landscape paintings derived from scenes of Lagos. Stylistic identities have also surfaced through explorations in styles by painters like Ola Balogun who introduced abstract expressionistic mannerisms into his landscapes (Plate 6). Others include while Emenike Ogwo, known for extreme impasto; Gbenga Orimoloye reputable for his free but accurate knife strokes and Olusegun Oduyele (Plate 7); where stylised landscapes are characterised by lines, minimal colours and child-like spontaneity. Naturalism which has always been the popular style in modern Nigerian art has been upgraded to photographic realism in the landscapes of painters like Oluwafemi Otoki (Plate 8) and Mufutau Apooyin. Compared to the periods before the 1970s, the post 2000 showed qualitative and quantitative growth in landscape painting in Lagos State.



Plate 6. Ola Balogun, *Eko Akete*, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 122cm, 2008.

Source: Ola Balogun.



Plate 7. Plate 7. Olusegun Oduyele, *Yellow Buses (Night Model)*, acrylic, 41 x 51cm, 2014.
Source: Olusegun Oduyele.



Plate 8. Oluwafemi Otoki, *Ikorodu*, oil on canvas, 152 x 152cm, 2008.
Source: Oluwafemi Otoki.

II. CONCLUSION

Although, documented developmental history of the art of landscape painting in Nigeria is rare, this short view of landscape painting in Lagos State has shown that the art has been a productive area in modern Nigerian art. The art has witnessed numerical, thematic and stylistic growth while the increasing number of new entrants into the city of Lagos portends a more creative and dynamic future for the growth of landscape painting in Lagos State. However, landscape painting in Lagos State is still in need of proper art-historical study. Such a

study which will take cognisance of the thematic and stylistic developments of landscape painting in Nigeria generally and in Lagos State in particular is needed. Such a study is even more needed in Lagos State when the fact that the state is a very important point in the history of modern art in Nigeria. This will help in further entrenching the position of Nigeria in the artistic world map.

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