

## EVALUATING THE ROLE OF VISUAL ART IN THE BEAUTIFICATION OF ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Abeokuta which literally means “under the Rock” is the biggest city in Ogun State and also the capital city. It covers 879 square kilometers of land mass with 494,700 people as at 2015 population census. The landscape of different locations in the metropolis are adorned with artworks which add to the aesthetic appeals of the environment. These artworks are erected or put in place by Government, individuals and organizations. This paper takes a look at the role of visual arts such as Sculpture, Art works on architectural designs and Graphic Arts in the beautification of the city. Eight sculptural works one mosaic design and one mural painting are analyzed and objectively critiqued. Suggestions are made on some areas that need attention as well as other forms of art that could be put in place to make the metropolis to be more beautiful as it is in other major cities especially the state capitals in Nigeria. The research was carried out through fieldwork, interview, photograph, personal observations and review of related literature.*

**Keywords:** *Landscape, Visual Art, Metropolis, Sculpture, Architectural Design*

### INTRODUCTION

Visual art is primarily the type of art that appeals to our sense of sight. It can be seen and touched if possible, it is basically divided into two parts, Fine Art and Applied Art. Fine Art deals with aesthetics and beautification or in another word decoration. It includes painting, sculpture and drawing while Applied Art concerns itself with art works that serve utility purpose. They are functional and perform other functions than just aesthetics. Applied Art which is also called commercial arts or functional art

which includes Ceramics, Graphic art, Textile design, Photography and Craft

It is visual art that actually deals with environmental beautification as observed in the mounting of art work in the urban cities. This paper focuses on the role of Visual arts in Abeokuta metropolis.

### Abeokuta

Abeokuta was founded in 1830 after the tribal wars ravaged refugees in Egba forest from their original homes between 1817 and 1830. The name of the

town “ABEOKUTA” was derived from the protection which the fleeing settlers sought under the Olumo Rock, now a tourists centre in the town. Abeokuta means “The refugees under a rock” signifying the protection which the Olumo Rock offered the refugees from possible attacks.

Abeokuta is the largest city and state capital of Ogun State in Southwest Nigeria. It is situated on the east bank of the Ogun River near a group of rocky outcrops in a wooded savanna; 77 kilometers North of Lagos by railways or 130 kilometers by water [Wikipedia, 2019].

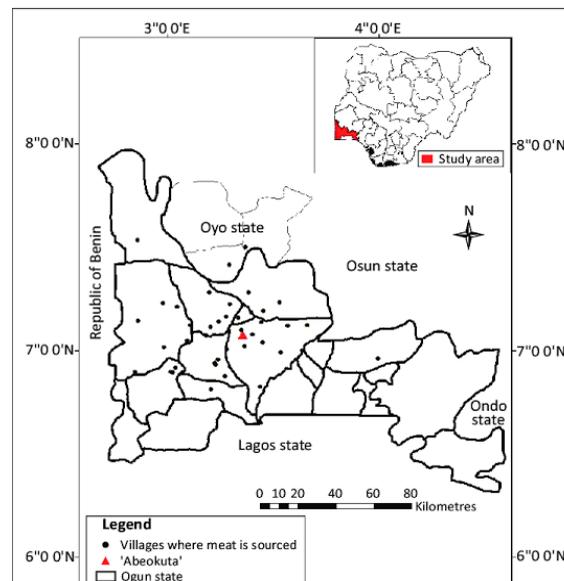
Economically, Abeokuta is an agricultural state where palm oil, natural rubber, yam, rice, cassava,

maize, cotton, other fruits, and shea butter are the chief articles of trade. It is a key export location for cocoa, palm products, fruit and kolanuts. Both rice and cotton were introduced by the missionaries in the 1850s and have become integral parts of the economy along with the dye indigo. Local industries include but not limited to fruit canning plants, plastic, breweries, sawmills, and an aluminum products factory. South of the town are the Aro granite quarries.

Abeokuta being a Yoruba city embrace the same Yoruba culture as other Yorubas. The religion of the people basically includes Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion.



**Plate 1**  
**Map of Abeokuta**



**Plate 2**  
**Map of Ogun State showing Abeokuta**

Abeokuta, being a state capital attracts many groups of people like civil servants, bureaucrats politicians, tourists and business men. This result in conscious beautification of the city by the government, private sectors and individuals. These environmental beautifications include road and infrastructural development, horticulture and various forms of visual arts especially sculpture, painting, graphic art in form of advertisement which include mounting of bill boards, sign boards, banners for publicity. The production and display of these art works have not been scholastically documented, hence as times go on they will be lost in history. This paper will also add as literature for scholars on Abeokuta.

This study focuses on the role of Visual Art within Abeokuta metropolis only. It does not cover the infrastructural and architectural structures though mention are be made to art works on the these structures.

The methodology used for this research include visitation to Abeokuta city, taking of pictures, interview of some of the inhabitants and review of literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this paper include literature on definition and branches of art and literature on Abeokuta. Price (1994) stated that recorded history has it that notable visual art works began in Nigeria between 300 BC and 200 AD when Nok terracotta sculptures were made. Williams (1974, 103-112) made great efforts to trace the evolution of art especially metal. He states that around 1200 BC, objects of wrought iron became common in Egypt. Eyo, (1976) writing on the Nigerian art, comments on the bronze works of Ife, Benin, Igbo-Ukwu,

Tsoede and Tada. He reveals the richness of these works and the excellence in techniques used.

Scholars such as Babalola (1995,1-10), Oloidi (1995, 66),Fosu (1980), Adepegba (1995), and Ajiboye (2003), separately examine the origin of Nigerian contemporary art generally without paying any attention on sculpture or any other specialization. They trace the development of modern Nigerian Art by looking at the artists, art forms, stylistic and thematic growth of art generally. Chukuegu (1998, 3) classifies Nigerian Art into various fields of specializations like sculpture, painting, ceramics, textile, graphic art and printing. He attempted to trace the origin of modern Nigerian sculpture from Ben Enwonwu, the father of contemporary Nigerian sculpture to sculptors who trained in various Nigerian Art schools. Chukwugu (ibid 1) also points out that Areogun, Bamidele and Lamidi Fakeye were the pioneer traditional carvers who promoted the Oye Ekiti workshop centre set up by Reverend Fathers Kelvin Carrol and Sean O. Mahomey in the forties. No academic record that Abeokuta had began to experience public art in the area of visual art during this time

According to Filani (2003, 334) Akatakpo (1992) updated the list of emerging artists and group them into categories based on the individual artist, his form and training background. But Filani uses form and content as the basis for the classification of contemporary Nigerian Art. Akintonde (2004, 180) and Alonge (2004) researched into outdoor sculpture in southwestern Nigeria which include Abeokuta and in Kogi State respectively. All the above mentioned literature did not treat Nigerian contemporary art and artists mostly in the areas of painting, sculptures, prints and graphic arts.

So many scholars have written a lot about Abeokuta but not much has been written on the public visual art works within the metropolis. Akintonde and Seyi-Gbangbayau (2014) researched on the youth carnival sculptures in Abeokuta metropolis, they looked into the art works done by various carnival groups in capital city. The medium and styles of the works are analysed. They postulated that if proper maintenance is not given to the works disintegration may soon set in. Unfortunately majority of the carnival sculptures have either been destroyed or taken to different location other than the municipal where they were originally. Example of such works is the sculpture in plate 3

### THE VISUAL ARTS IN ABEOKUTA

For the purpose of this research, visual arts in Abeokuta shall be divided into three categories. Sculptures, Mosaic design and Mural Paintings which has graphical element in them. The reviewed sculptures will capture both sculptures in the round or free standing sculptures and relief sculptures

### SCULPTURES WITHIN ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS

Sculpture can simply be defined as images or statues produced by modeling, carving, casting, welding or construction methods. Some sculptures are in the round, that is they stand upright with space surrounding them; they can be appreciated from all angles. Other type of sculptures is relief sculpture. A relief sculpture is produced on a flat surface that cannot be viewed from all the side except the front view alone.



**Plate 3**

Tunde Cole: 2001, Ologbojigolo, fibre-glass, Oke-Ijeun, Abeokuta

*Photograph: Courtesy, Seyi-Gbangbayau Paul, 2010*

### SOKENU STATUE:

Notable among the sculptural works that decorate the city of Abeokuta is the statue of Sokenu, an Egba Warrior and the progenitor of Ago Egun people in Sokenu area of Abeokuta. Oral history states that he was a contemporary of Sodeke and Lisabi of Egba land.

According to the artist who produced the work Artist Seyi-Gbangbayau Paul the statue was commissioned by the elders of Sokenu community, Abeokuta in 2014 aimed at given at a permanent memorial to this historical icon. The work was unveiled by the Alake of Egbaland Oba Aremu Gbadebo, the paramount ruler of Egbaland. However the

positioning of the work is aesthetically wrong because it is not spacious enough to allow proper view of the work and both the electric pole in front and the shop beside it are serious obstruction to its view.



**Plate 4**

Location: The statue is located at Sokenu directly opposite the state Hospital, Ijaye, Abeokuta. The Artist: Seyi – Gbangbayau Paul a Sculptor and a lecturer at the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro. Medium: Fiber glass and metal, Size: Life Size, Year: 2014

## **IYALODE:**

The statue of Iyalode of Egbaland is located at Sokori, near Totoro in Abeokuta. According to oral report from some Abeokuta based artists it was commissioned by Egba Elite club to immortalize the first Iyalode of Egbaland, Madam EfunroyeTinunbu for her valiant performance as a renown Egba female icon.

Artist: Agbabika A graduate of Yaba college of Technology who was then a youth corp member



**Plate 5**

Title: Iyalode, Medium: concrete and metal, Size: 8f, Year: 1988

The location of the statue is good and spacious because of it is positioned in a fairly big roundabout, however, the flowers around the roundabout should not be left to over grown as not to disturb the view of the statue.

### ILE ORISA:

The building which housed the relief sculptures and the statue of Igunuko masquerade which is one of the Yoruba deities is located at Ago-egun Abeokuta. The work is designed to show some mythological Yoruba icons to promote the African religion.



**Plate 6**

Title: Ile Orisa, Artist: Abiodun Ajibesin,  
Technique: direct modeling, Medium: Cement,  
Location: Ago-egun, Abeokuta, 2010  
*Photograph courtesy: Idowu Olatuji, 2018*

### IYA ALAPE:

From interview granted to some elders within the community where the work is located historically, Iya Alape was a woman who specialized in the production of local pap cooked from a big pot. Children were said to admire her greatly. Hence they are seen around her patronizing her product. The work is multiple figures and it is dramatic, hence it attracts people's attention by the road side where it is located.



**Plate 7**

Unknown artist; Location: Ijemo, Concrete,  
Abeokuta, 2013;.  
*Photograph courtesy: Idowu Olatuji, 2018*

## **GELEDE:**

This statue is to promote the worship of Gelede in Ago Egun area where Gelede is one of the deities they worship. Yoruba history indicate that Gelede celebrates mothers (awon Iyawa), a group that includes female ancestors and the spiritual capacity this women acquired. The white colour with which the sculpture is painted gives it a spectacular look that attracts people towards its direction.



**Plate 8**

Unknown artist, Gelede, Concrete, Size 5ft  
*Photography courtesy: Olatunji Idowu, 2018*

## **UNITY:**

The statue of unity is represented with a big hand surrounded by some people who jointly hold the hand in a cooperative manner. Not much is known about those who commissioned the work except that it was done by Bamidele Micheal one of the sons of Areogun a family of traditional carvers from Kwara State as revealed by Paul Seyi-Gbangbayau who was a student of Bamidele at the Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta about the time the sculpture was produced.



**Plate 9**

Title: Unity, Artist: Michael Bamidele; Medium: Concrete; Original location: Oke Ilewo Area in Abeokuta, 1989

*Photography courtesy: Paul Seyi-Gbangbayau, 2000*

## TALKING DRUM AND POT:

Not much is known about this sculpture except that it is the composition of two hands carrying a pot and a talking drum. The artist or those who commissioned it are unknown, however, the possibility that it must have been commissioned by a youth carnival group is very high. The composition and the location also remind one that Ijaye roundabout where it is located is popular for its local pottery practice and the traditional talking drum families that are indigenes of that community.



**Figure 10**

Concrete, Ijaye, Abeokuta

*Photography courtesy: Olatunji Idowu, 2018*

## MURAL DECORATIONS:

Mural decoration or painting is a type of painting done on a wall. There are various mural designs on all the four currently completed fly-over bridges

constructed within Abeokuta metropolis. Each of these designs has its own theme and designs. However, one common thing in all is that they all have some captions in line with the then political dispensation. The slogan says “**Mission to rebuild and Omo Ogun Iseya**” which makes them not to be just for decoration alone but also instruments of political voice. Most of the mural paintings are figurative and decorative.



**Plate 11**

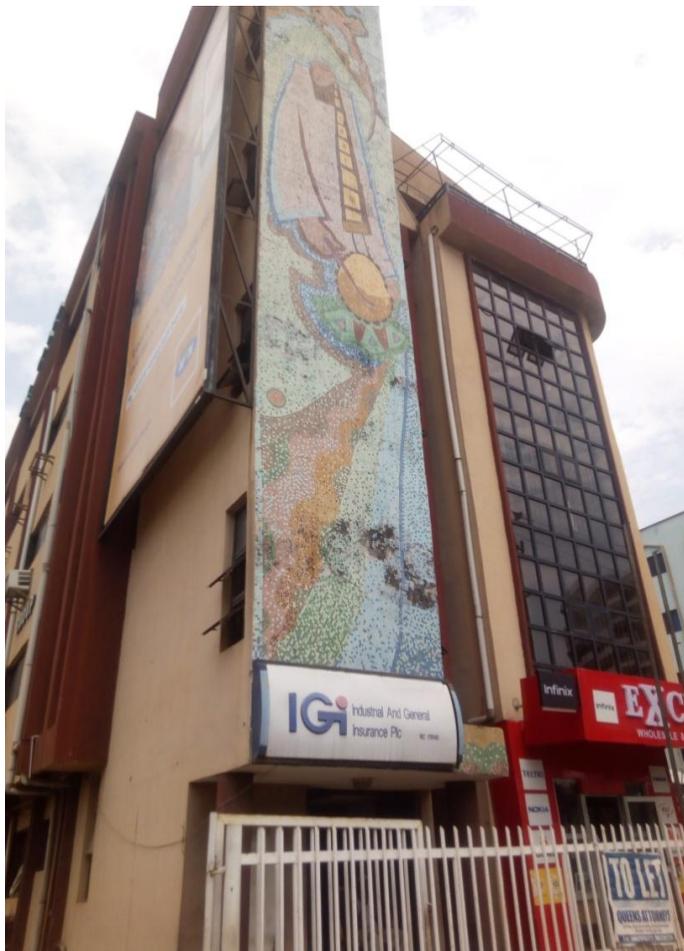
Iyana Mortuary Bridge, Abeokuta

*Photography courtesy: Olatunji Idowu, 2018*

## MOSAIC DESIGN:

Mosaic design is a type of painting done on walls with pieces of small square tiles, glass or broken bottles. Mosaic design is not a common thing in Abeokuta. The most conspicuous is the one on the wall of K Plaza building at Okeilewo area of Abeokuta. This work being the only one of its kind

in Abeokuta, stands out clearly as a focal point of environmental beauty in that vicinity. It indeed enhance the role of visual art in Abeokuta.



**Plate 12**

Seyi-Gbangbayau P. and Adeleye J. A: Celebration,  
Mosaic, Oke-Ilewo, 2001

Photography courtesy: Seyi-Gbangbayau P., 2011

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Apart from the art works mentioned in this paper there may be other ones located in some interior part of the city. This research focused on the art works along the major roads and streets. In addition however are many Bill Boards, sign boards and several signages on the road sides adverting products and events. The above art works are purely environmental works which do not only add to the beauty of the society but also promote history and the culture of the people. In directly the production of those works have also enhance the economy of the artists their by promoting the overall economy of the country. The conservation and preservation of art works should be the concern of all not just the artists alone. Both the government and the professionals in the built industry should cooperate in area of sustaining the beauty of the environment through artistic expressions.

Ministry of Education at all levels should develop policies and programmes that will promote art in our schools thereby developing interest for art in the students. Art teachers and artists generally should begin to see the money making aspect of art too.

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