



AN ANALYSIS OF LASISI LAMIDI'S METAL SCULPTURES

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Abstract

Sculpture is an artistic form in which hard or plastic materials are worked into three-dimensional art objects, and could be in the round (free standing), in relief on surfaces, or in environments ranging from tableaus to contexts that envelope the spectator. An enormous variety of media may be used, including clay, stone, metal, glass, wood, and randomly “found objects.” However, it may take the form of whatever it seeks to represent from pure, or semi-abstract to lifelike depiction of people, animal or any other entity. This paper therefore, appraises some of the metal sculptures of Lasisi Lamidi; a university lecturer, whose striking studio and research experiences in the use of steel rod and oil on canvas for stylized sculptures have been of immense influence on the contemporary Nigerian artists who are familiar with his works. Such among many evaluated in this piece include **Couple, Teenager, From the Market, The Praise.**

Key words: Sculpture, Welded sculpture, Analysis, Art criticism,

INTRODUCTION

When one hears the word “art criticism,” one may first imagine people standing in an art gallery frowning their brows as they point out the flaws in a painting or sculpture or even drawing. But it is needful to note, according to Wilson (2016), that art criticism is more than just commenting on a work of art or pointing out what is wrong with it. In fact, art criticism is the act of analyzing and evaluating any type of art.

Sporre (2006) further buttresses that, criticism implies many things to many people; criticism does not necessarily mean passing or saying negative comments about a work of art. Oftentimes, many think of critics as people who pass judgement, giving their opinions on the value of a

painting, sculpture, and so on. Passing judgement may result from criticism, but criticism implies more than passing judgement. Criticism, for the negative mind is meant to find fault, while for a positive minded person. Criticism can be made for the purpose of enhancing, appreciating, protecting an art work, just to mention but a few. Hence, the analysis of Lasisi's metal sculptures is to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the artist and his works.

Therefore, this paper will proceed by articulating Lasisi Lamidi's background as an artist; an overview of some artists' sculptural works will also be made to show the diversity in sculptural practice. Thereafter, some of Lasisi Lamidi's welded sculptures will be analysed. Thus, the conclusion will be drawn based on the analysis made.

Background of Lasisi Lamidi

Lasisi Lamidi, a sculptor and a painter is one of the ardent and talented Nigerian young artists that strongly believe in experimental works, and this is evident in his numerous sculptures, paintings and drawings. He was born in Bibiani, Ghana on 4th September, 1966. He acquired B.A. (Hons.) Fine Arts from the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1990, specializing in sculpture, where he emerged as one of the best five in his class. He also did a Master of Fine Arts degree (M.F.A) at the same institution in 1998, with an interesting and exciting research work in the use of steel rod for stylized sculpture. He has also just completed a Ph.D. programme in the same university, researching on the Yoruba stilt dancer (*Agere*) for inspiration in sculptural possibilities.

However, it is imperative to note that the artist has been involved with some other forms of expressions, which include the mosaic and murals in the course of his career. He worked with EMG & Co. Ltd, Artists & Designers, Zaria, as studio assistant between 1989 to 1990, and also as an Artist in Module-D Associate & Designers, Zaria between 1991 to 1994 (Aina and Lasisi, 2000). The writer has no doubt, in his mind that all these experiences contributed greatly to Lasisi's creativity.

Lasisi, is a keen studio artist who has inspired and motivated many other artists in his several studio experiments. The works of a highly skilled foundry man called Julio Gonzales have been of huge influences on him such that both of them have turned to modeling in order to truly understand the depth, volume and form associated with three-dimensional figures. He has participated in over forty exhibitions both locally and abroad, and his several art projects and commissions spread across the country. Presently, he is a lecturer in the department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he teaches sculpture, and acts as the departmental officer in charge of exhibition. Also, he is a curator and an artist in Gallery-3, Zaria. An outfit founded by him and Ayo Aina, a painter.

An Overview of some Welded Sculptures

The first welded sculpture to be analysed in this paper is the one titled "*Couple*." It is an abstract sculpture depicting two figures of crawling creatures that look like lizards in a friendly and loving posture. The work is executed in 2006 with steel, clad with canvas and painted with artist oil colour (see plate I).

The artist positioned the nodding lizards beside each other in such a manner that appears, the two are conversing, one seems to be talking and the other appears to be listening, which evokes the feelings of companionship, mutuality and agreement.

The interesting thing to note here is the freedom with which the artist organized the elements and principles of design in a theatrical manner. The use of fluid lines to produce different geometric shapes, to express various parts of the work is attention-grabbing and fascinating. The heads, eyes, the fore and hind limbs and the tails, are arranged to maintain a balance. The slender trunks are depicting the look of lizards including some of the features on the necks, hind limbs and so on. All of these, bring to the memory of Jean Arp's statement in Onoja *et al* (2016) that 'art should lose itself in nature, should even be mistaken for nature...only one must not try to achieve this by imitating, but by the very opposite of naturalistic imitation.' Without doubt, the artist's technique of abstraction is effective in executing his imaginative concepts.

Another paramount factor to behold is the artist's use of colours on the welded sculpture and the use of canvas to cover parts of the heads and the trunks, on which he expresses his design concept on the lizards via oil colours. This style paves way for variety and dislodges colour monotony, which is synonymous to sculpture, in the work. The lizards' back portray the rhythmic movement of colours. Again, one could discern, from the appearance of the posture critically, the male and female lizards. The tender look, the seemingly fold-like neck and the small body-mass portrays the female lizard.

Looking critically, also, at the two reptiles, one will be reminded of how some wives, using sugar-coated tongues to brain-wash their husbands in order to gain favour and receive attention. Apparently, from oral narrations, this scenario is common with African women, most especially among the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. A wife knows how to eulogize or raise her husband's ego using his lineage praises to gladden his heart and make him feel highly esteemed than normal. This, therefore, subsequently prompts the man to give instant approval of his wife's request even if it is hitherto against his wish. With this affectionate posture and composition, the writers have no dissenting opinion about the theme or title given to the work, but to agree with the artist, that indeed, these lizards are a couple.



PLATE I

COUPLE, 2006 (STEEL AND OIL ON CANVAS)

The second to be analysed is the one Lasisi titled “*Teenager*” executed in 2006 with steel and oil on canvas. It is an abstract concept portraying a young girl in her prime age. The teenager is looking excited, optimistic and calm, full of hopes and expectations for the future. The use of lines to create different forms in the whole work is tactically and creatively done. Beginning from the head; the hair-style that shows a nail-like form at the back, the eye, the dangling ear-ring, and the round-folded neck, down to the pointed breasts (see plate II). The artist uses a variety of materials linearly, with good effects.

The body, rendered in a small and slender frame, portrays a young female figure that is coming of age. The use of colours and rhythmic brushstrokes on the circular and canvas clad head, and skirt, create an exciting painterly effect on the sculpture. In Lamidi's African women series, as pointed out by Aina *et al* (1996) that "his continuous paintings of figurative women in his compositions, helped him study ways of reducing the female form to its essential and fundamental elements in his sculpture." This, in the opinion of these writers, has made his female form treatment delicate yet, excitingly simple.

Another thing the writers observe in this work is that, the treatment of the figure can as well be likened to the appearance of *Akuaba* dolls of Ashanti in Ghana. The heads of these *Akuaba* dolls, according to Leuzinger (1976), are disc-like; the bodies are narrow and rectangular. The similarity of the form to the *Akuaba* dolls shows the artist's creativity power and versatility, in recreating traditional motifs, to suit modern expression.



PLATE II

TEENAGER, 2006 (STEEL AND OIL ON CANVAS)

The third work under this appraisal is the one titled "*From the Market*." It is executed in 2005 with steel, found objects and oil on canvas (mixed media). It is an abstract sculpture, portraying a female figure coming home from the market (see plate III).

Apparently, one could see how the artist artistically arranges the steel rods together, to give a dynamic posture to the work. Technical proficiency is exhibited here, by the artist, especially in the way he positioned the load at the top, with the dramatic movement of the body in a twisting manner, yet maintaining its balance. According to Onoja *et al* (2016), 'free standing and three-dimensional sculptures force sculptors to concern themselves with the practicalities of engineering and gravity.' It is noted further that sculptors cannot create a work with great mass at the top as seen in this work, unless they can find a way to keep the statue from falling over. Consequently, Lasisi Lamidi, again, has demonstrated a fair of this mechanics here.

The skillful use of colours on the work also shows the artist's mastery and freedom, on the choice of colours. Indeed, Lasisi, being a trained sculptor, can as well be described as a colourist. The skirt and the load are treated in a polychromatic manner with blue and red, and also with a touch of white in-between to portray the effects of light and shade.

Furthermore, a critical look at the artist's use of lines, create movement that resulted into hands that are loosely spread around the body, the trunk tilted sideways on a broad hip, the load is rested on the head without a support, and with supposed majestic steps, the figure seems walking in an exciting mood. A pair of spring rod is used for its short sleeves, which makes the dress looks a simple blouse.

The sculpture brings one to reminiscence on the Nigerian market scene, where unrestricted joy illuminates the face of a seller who experiences a boom in his/her sale for the day. The movement on the work reveals this joy.



PLATE III
FROM THE MARKET, 64CM, 2005
(STEEL AND OIL ON CANVAS)

The fourth work is titled “*The Praise*” and is executed in 2006 with steel and oil on canvas. It is also an abstract concept, displaying a slim graceful figure, with wide hip, seemingly singing praises to her maker (see plate IV).

In this composition, Lasisi attempts to capture the nature of a praising woman in her genuine outlook. Also, there is a dramatic expression of feelings in the use of lines to portray different forms of all the features of the figure. These include the praising hands that are stretched out in the open space, the twisted and slim-waisted body, the wide hollowed hip, the apparel's ropes around the waist side; perhaps to show the garment's style, and the parted legs are all positioned to create balance, rhythm and even variety in terms of different postures of the parts of the body.

The work is monochromatic and there is unity as evident in the whole composition. According to Egonwa (1994), the traditional Igbo adore long neck as an acceptable bodily type in feminine beauty. The author further points out that, the copulated neck with rings of flesh is also an adored feminine feature among the Asante and many other Africans. All these are glaringly represented in the work, and of course, speak volume of the artist's appreciation and critical perception of the art tradition of other places.

In addition, there is a close affinity between the outlook of the work and the title, as given by the artist, and this is obvious in the work “*The Praise.*” The work appears to be religious and thus, reminds one of many gospel singers who are wholly consumed and even lost in worship during their ministrations or concerts.



PLATE IV

THE PRAISE, 2006 (STEEL AND OIL ON CANVAS)

CONCLUSION

Paul Gauguin in Aina *et al.* (1996) points out that “art is abstraction, derive this abstraction from nature, while dreaming before it and think more of the creation, which will result then of nature.” The main essence of Lasisi’s metal sculptures is to use lines in its different sizes and thicknesses to create wonderful and artistic forms, mostly in abstract and derived from nature. This is evident in all the works appraised and shown in this paper. They are aesthetic expressions that evoke diverse feelings and created within a variety of materials and ideas.

During the interaction with the artist, the writers were made to understand that he tries to marry sculpture and painting in his expressions which is an innovation in artistic practice. He further stresses that sculptural pieces are always very heavy, and as such, become immovable compared to works in paintings, textile designs, and graphic designs and so on. In his quest for solution, to lighten the heavy weight of sculptural works, he came up with this style that can be described as minimalist sculpture.

Also, the vitality of form, emotive content and the enduring nature of the artistic rendition of these pieces, capture the heart of the writers. Though the writers have seen works of sculpture and painting married together, using fiber-glass, but not in the way that Lasisi did his own. This, thus, makes it unique and exciting. His ideological posture of putting his best, in all his visual pontifications, have thus, resulted in his works revealing some sense of maturity, thoughtfulness and dynamism. These are evident in his painterly sculptures and are considered fascinating and

successful by the writers. The writers further believe this paper will inspire other artists and art critics alike, and also serve as a source document to other scholars.

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