ABSTRACT
History is replete with great artistic icons who made poignant statements using the visual arts. In contemporary art practice, several artists have created works which by all standards are masterpieces and carry didactic messages of which Ezekiel Udubrae is one. This paper examines the historiography of the oeuvres of Udubrae, motivation, philosophy and salient contributions to contemporary art practice in Nigeria. The research relies on art historical qualitative method of inquiry using interview, field visits and purposive sampling of works. The paper tries to bridge the gap of understanding of contemporary art and the place of individuals like Udubrae’s contributions in documenting history for generations after. The contemporary art of today is the history of tomorrow; art historians stand at the vantage position of bringing such to the fore of which this paper espouses.

Keywords: Ezekiel Udubrae, galleries, historiography, visual arts

INTRODUCTION
Contemporary Nigerian art has undergone various phases of development. From the early pioneer artists like Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Justus Akeredolu and a host of others who advanced the course of the visual arts, the practice of art has flourished in the country. Works produced by artists in their various studios have at one time or the other been displayed in galleries or exhibition halls during solo or group exhibitions for the public to appreciate and probably buy as decorative items or collections for historical documentation. The place of artworks and display of such in a gallery for the promotion, preservation and historical documentation of such artworks in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized in the development of contemporary art in Nigeria. Egonwa (1994), says that contemporary art refers to all artistic expressions currently existing in Africa. He explains that it consists of works created by college-trained artists and their apprentices, self-taught artists and traditionalists (informally trained artists). In a sense, it involves all artworks of our time.

The role of public and private galleries in the promotion and presentation of Nigerian art is notable. The last ten years have witnessed the establishment of hundreds of galleries – public and private – that provide ample exhibition space for young artists. Most are located in Lagos, the melting point of Nigerian cultural activities, but there are also several high-profile galleries elsewhere, for example, in Enugu, Ibadan, Abuja, Kaduna and Jos. Jos, the Plateau State capital, noted for its tourism potentials, has witnessed several influxes of tourists from within and outside the country. The tourism potentials of the state have led to the establishment of various contemporary visual arts practices (painting, ceramics, sculpture, graphics, Textile designs, photography, installation art etc) for the display and sale of contemporary art works and other souvenirs to tourists and lovers of art. Several young artists establish studios and galleries of their own in Jos through which they make a living and establish their mark in the art scene of the country. One
of such artists is Udubrae Ezekiel, a seasoned painter and one time lecturer at the Institute of Archaeology and Museum Studies in Jos; currently retired to full time studio and gallery practice at the Udubrae art gallery, Jos Museum Premises. Udubrae’s burning passion for art and its promotion led to the establishment of his private gallery called “Udubrae Art Gallery” which exhibits predominantly his paintings and other art forms created by him and works of people he has mentored or encouraged in art practice, and the revitalization of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) Plateau State chapter of which he was the first State Chairman. His impact on the Society led to a series of solo and group art exhibitions on the Jos - Plateau. It is on this premise, therefore, that a historiography of Udubrae’s artworks and his contribution to contemporary art in Nigeria is intended to articulate the potency of history in placing the understanding of art in the documentation.

Historical Background

The evolution of art in Africa and especially Nigeria has followed three phases that are not hermetically sealed from one another. The first stage is the traditional phase, which was gradually overtaken by a transitional phase, which in turn gave way to a modern phase (Egonwa, 1994). Traditional Nigerian art refers to the original art style and cultural phase before contact with other peoples of the outside world. The summit of Nigerian traditional artistic attainment is best represented by four major traditions which are sometimes referred to as the ancient Nigerian treasures that have earned world attention, namely: Nok (900 BC–200 AD), Igbo-Ukwu (9th century A.D), Ife (12th-15th century A.D), and Benin (15th–18th century A.D). Nok is thought to be an Iron-working civilization with a bulk of the findings housed in the Jos Museum. The finds are essentially clay figurines and beads appropriately described as terracotta culture. The other three cultures basically represent bronze traditions which are seen in family shrines, worship areas and dedicated gallery spaces. It is important to note that galleries existed in the traditional era of Nigerian art. Artworks produced were kept in places such as shrines, traditional priest abodes, sacred halls like Obunkwa Ohafia, the Mbari house, the palaces of traditional rulers like those of the Oba of Benin, the Ooni of Ife, and the houses of the elderly, heads of families and artists. These places where traditional artworks are kept serve as the nucleus of gallery development and modern museum collections today in Nigeria (Ikpakronyi, 2002).

The transitional phase of Nigerian art which deals with neo-traditional artists has produced great artists who combined traditional motifs with modern stylistic expressions to create their artworks. A good example is Ibeto’s (1912-1995) works. This transitional phase gave rise to the modern phase of art in Nigeria, and many stylistic trends can be identified, such as naturalistic, abstract and expressive imageries. These represent the mainstream into which the majority of modern and contemporary artists can be classified.

In Africa, modern art thus dates to the last quarter of the 19th century when contact with Europe became fully established. It, however, became well defined in the 20th century. Modern Nigerian art as a label, therefore, has been used interchangeably with contemporary Nigerian art, however, there is a clear distinction between modern and contemporary art. According to Dike (2003):

> contemporary Nigerian art, sometimes also referred to as modern Nigerian art. This is generally remarkable for its departure from linkages with religions or ritual worship, which constituted an important, but by no means the only element of traditional art. Rather it concerns aesthetics, the expression of ideas and values and social comments.

In the Nigerian contemporary art today, the knowledge of the activities of young artists, their works and galleries where such works are exhibited for public view is relatively low as there exists limited literature on their artworks. However, the more established older generation of artists have great inspiring literature on them as artists, their artworks and the general modus operandi of their studios and galleries thereby drawing attention both locally and internationally. The likes of Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Yusuf Grillo, and a host of others too numerous to mention are good examples. Today, the efforts of art historians and other art critics have helped to sustain discussions on contemporary artists and the visual arts. This modest effort is what this paper aims at with the view of articulating the efforts of a sage in visuals in Jos, Plateau State – Nigeria in other to give him the pride of place in historical parlance.
The establishment of the National Gallery of Modern art has marked an important landmark in the history of Nigerian artistic development. For instance, the birth of the gallery has met one of the challenges posed by the rapidly growing contemporary art of the country. The National Gallery of Art (NGA) has since 1993, the year of its establishment, put in place programmes for promoting contemporary Nigerian artists. It projects Nigerian visual artists through art exhibitions and other related activities including the award of grants to artists. This gesture by the National Gallery of Art has led to the establishment of several private art galleries across the country for the presentation, preservation and promotion of contemporary artists and their artworks. These include that of Chief Aina Onabolu in his residence at 15, Osholake Street, Ebute – Metta, Lagos established in 1954. It is regarded as a private art gallery because it displayed Onabolu’s works and those of his students for public viewing. Others include that of Felix Idubor named “Idubor Art Gallery” at No. 20 Sakpoba street, Benin City, and it is still operational today. Also worthy of Note is Uche Okeke’s Asele Institute, a two storey building in Nimo, Anambra state. It serves as an art studio, gallery and museum for his collection. According to Ikpakronyi (1998), “The Institute has contributed effectively to the promotion and presentation of Nigerian contemporary art to the outside world”. Individual artists start private practice and blossom over time to become artists of great repute due to their styles, philosophies and art forms. It is against this background, therefore, that a study of Udubrae’s artworks and his contribution to contemporary art in Nigeria is being carried out to add to knowledge and literary source on private art practice in Nigeria.

The statement of the problem of this paper stems from the fact that, many artists and artworks with poignant statements exist in Nigeria with little or no critique and literature on them, especially those in the northern part of the country. Udubrae, who is the focus of this discussion have painted, sculpted and exhibited for sometimes now, but little is known of him in the art scene of the country. The artworks of Udubrae are not adequately documented through any scholarly work known to the researcher. It is on this basis, therefore, that this study is intended to examine Udubrae and his works for possible assessment of the level of his oeuvre’s contribution to art practice in contemporary Nigerian art. More so, the study lies on the fact that literature on Udubrae and his artworks is scanty and consequently, the awareness of contemporary artworks and artist is low on the Jos-Plateau. In addition, Udubrae Ezekiel is known only to a few people in Jos and its environs, while he is being celebrated by the international community for his prolific art practice. The author hopes to evaluate the activities of the artist in order to document and contribute to scholarly works on contemporary art practice in Nigeria, especially in the North – Central of Nigeria, with Jos as a case in point. The luminous colours of Udubrae through the use of brilliant lemon yellow and other warm and cool colours are intended to be studied in this effort.

Literature Review
In Nigerian contemporary art, the role of the public and private galleries in the promotion and presentation of Nigerian art and artists are notable. This is largely due to the fact that works produced in various studios come to a lime-light through the activities of galleries and the efforts of art critics. There is a vastly improved collection of artworks as the numbers of foreign visitors continue to acquire Nigerian contemporary art. Along this line, gallery development started in Nigeria and has in no small measure enhanced art practice in the country. Nigeria Magazine (1967) and Ikpakronyi (2002), give a copious account of contemporary art practice and how various pioneer Nigerian artists like Aina Onabolu who started exhibitions in the 1900s, Justus Akeredolu, Akinola Lasekan, Ben Enwonwu and others started, etching their marks on the rocks of visual arts history. The afore mentioned authors’ accounts state four generations of artists and how several more artists are emerging in Nigeria after them of which Udubrae Ezekiel falls into the current trend of artists.

Review of Literature on Udubrae
The literature on Udubrae Ezekiel is scanty, except for a few write-ups on him in exhibition catalogues, magazines, and newspapers. It is important to note that great artists have little beginnings which are sometimes obscured. For Udubrae, he made national headline at the young age of 23 years. In an article by Agbahwe (1978) captioned “Udubrae the artist aims high”, the author notes that:
my long-held belief that artists are born and not made was strengthened and at the same time shaken when I took up coming artist Ezekiel Udubrae for an interview. The contradictions arose because, even though he confirmed my conviction, Udubrae’s explanation of his pieces of artworks was so clear that I felt he could make an artist out of me.

The author also reports that every potential artist, if spotted early enough, could be made a great one through the classroom. He notes that Udubrae, though comparatively young, is already old in the world of art. Udubrae affirms this by saying: “I started painting beautiful and imaginative pictures even before I entered the primary school”. The author goes on to reaffirm that this little-known artist at 23, who is so confident of himself has neither staged an exhibition nor taken part in any. According to the author, Udubrae further expatiates on this statement by stating that: “I will not stage any exhibition of my works until I have a whole room of 366cm x 488cm completely filled with beautiful pieces of high standard of artworks”. It is pertinent to note that close to two decades after the above statement, Udubrae has exhibited in several solos and joint exhibitions, and is still exhibiting and making his mark in contemporary Nigerian art as an artist and scholar.

Ajakaiye (1984), in introducing Udubrae in his first solo exhibition titled “New Dimensions in Painting” reports that:

One thing that remains still exciting about Udubrae is that he is not from the conventional school of art, having graduated from the College of Education, Benin City in 1982. He is in his thirties and one sees a flutter of ideas and vigour in his products revealing a rich and seasoned store of blossoming creativity. This exhibition, the first solo by him will be seen as a great attempt to reach out to the greater part of the art connoisseurs. He is currently an education officer with the National Museum, Ibadan where his zeal in productivity in art could be seen by both his colleagues, the children he influences and the general public.

Udubrae has been an influence in the field of visual art even before his solo exhibition as emphasized by Aghahwe and Ajakaiye. His driving creative urge is apparent from the exhibition staged by him. Ajakaiye (1984) reiterates that Udubrae has a fascinating degree of polificity. He states: “Udubrae has been able to tell several stories with the application of several media, both direct and improvised”. Ajakaiye gives a breakdown of the array of rich art works on display by Udubrae, ranging from very realistic portraits to the very architectonic ones. Landscapes in rich harmonious colours, of dazzling effects, abstract paintings with successful interplay of colours and geometric shapes which does not require logical or cumbersome philosophical cross-word puzzle understanding to understand their meanings. His mixed-media works using veneer and paints are simply communicative. Udubrae also included a number of screen-printed fabrics to show his versatility. His frames were improvised, nevertheless very suitable, a lesson which other artists should learn. The aspect of improvisation by this artist and his versatility is noteworthy. In a society where it is believed that only the rich class can buy any artwork is debunked by Udubrae through his production of artworks using improvised materials and fabric prints for the masses who are not well-to-do. This aspect is his salient contribution to art appreciation and acquisition among the poor masses as several households boast of his paintings in their collection.

In a joint exhibition by the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), Oyo state chapter titled “Reawakening” which held from October 28th to November 4th, 1992. Udubrae was one of the active participants. He had at one time or the other served as an exco-member of the SNA. Ifeta (1992) reports that “Other positions were filled in one of the subsequent meetings. Mr. Tiri Oladimeji, Assistant Secretary; Mr. G. Aremu, Vice Chairman, Ex-Officio members include: Mr. Supo Adewusi and Mr. Ezekiel Udubrae”. From the fore-going, Udubrae has served at one point as an executive member of the SNA, and has no doubt contributed his quota to the development of the Society and contemporary art in general in Nigeria through the Oyo State Chapter of the SNA and other places where his art practice has taken him. The statement of Osunleke (1992) in his foreword to the exhibition is noteworthy:

Art is an essential ingredient in the life of a nation as it reflects its oral traditions and beliefs and the stories and antecedents of its people. It promotes the nation’s cultural heritage and international understanding. It is in recognition of this fact that adequate provision was made for the promotion and preservation of Fine Arts in the cultural policy of Nigeria.
This promotion and preservation which the author talks about were witnessed by Udubrae since he was an active participant in the group exhibition.

In a welcome address in yet another solos exhibition by Udubrae titled “Symbol of Unity” Orewere (1994) remarks on dreams that could be realized through the exchange of arts, values, norms, tradition, language, habits and so on. This way we intentionally reduce or minimize the factors that preach differences amongst us, and cement those that weld us together. He states further that “[symbol of Unity]’, Mr. Ezekiel Udubrae’s artistic creation is designed to serve this important function of welding Nigeria and Nigerians together. We appreciate his vision.”

The author also notes that the art exhibition promotes and motivates identified creative talents to visually document the cultural tradition of a people for today and tomorrow. Secondly, that it spurs the creativity and industry of sons and daughters in their varying vocations, especially in situations where for lack of sufficient financial resources, talents have remained unexposed. The author aptly rounds-off by saying that Symbol of Unity which is a collection of Mr. Udubrae’s artworks represents Nigeria’s historically integrated cultures beyond the essence, the variety and quality of the exhibits in materials, forms and the ideas expressed, are a source of inspiration for all lovers of development. It is clear from this statement that Udubrae has documented the cultural heritage of his people through his art which has served as an integral form of communication to other Nigerian’s through his exhibits.

Appraising the same exhibition, Ifeta (1994), avers that “the works on display consists of themes of cultural activities in states of the north and west as well as Edo and Delta states. Some of his works are treated in conscious naturalism as in the portraits exhibited. Udubrae’s sense of aesthetic order is mirrored in his representational scenes.

Udubrae’s pedigree as a participant in many solo and joint exhibitions since 1980 can attest to his prolificity and dogged determination as an artist in Nigeria and abroad. In Cultural Manifestation, another solo exhibition by Udubrae, Arhuidese (2001), lists twenty-one (21) exhibitions (solo and joint) in which Udubrae has participated between 1980 and 1999. He remarks that “Mr. E. E. Udubrae should be congratulated on his unrelenting effort at educating and entertaining lovers of art in Nigeria and beyond in spite of the obvious uninspiring environmental variables in Nigeria for artists”. Heritage: Udubrae’s Sojourn on Canvas is another exhibition staged by Udubrae at the National Commission for Museum and Monument, Onikan, Lagos between 7th – 13th April, 2004. the Director-General of the National Commission for Museum and Monuments, Dr. Eluyemi Omotosho, notes that:

Contemporary art in Nigeria and all over the world is inspired by its cultural background. There has been tremendous progress in contemporary visual arts in Nigeria over the years, initially, Europeans were the ones patronising fine art, but today, it is good to note that a lot of Nigerians are interested in the arts. One finds that works are not just a celebration of individual talent but they are memorable commentary on contemporary life in Nigeria.

Omotosho continues by saying, “Udubrae is a realistic, creative and innovative artist of our time. He is one of the inspired artists destined to become a great man like Picasso and others of yesteryears in his days”. Ezeokeke (2004) comments that, Udubrae’s effort at promoting Nigerian heritage through visual arts is commendable. The author further reiterates: “heritage simply refers to any concept or thing, natural or artificial, which is considered to have aesthetic, historical, scientific or spiritual significance”. From the aforementioned, it is evident that Udubrae’s works have aesthetic values, documents today’s history for tomorrow’s study and have scientific application as seen in his perspective drawings and paintings, and also spiritual connotations as seen in his artworks with religious themes.

It is apparent from the foregoing that Udubrae has made his mark in the development of visual arts in the country. Although the literature is scanty, in this study, however, some other important contributions to contemporary art by Udubrae will be exposed in the course of this paper. Udubrae an erstwhile Lecturer of art and graphics at the Institute of Museum Studies in Jos is also the proprietor of Udubrae Art Gallery in Jos. This gallery is well patronized by Nigerians and foreigners alike. Udubrae says this about his art; “Art is my life, and I will do everything to ensure that it continues to thrive even in the face of technological advancement. Artists should paint, it is sad that most artist, especially those in the academia, shy away from practical work, I am an academician but I also run a
practical gallery, teaching is a lame excuse, he says. From Udubrae’s statement. It is noteworthy that he enjoys painting and his gallery practise which has served as a great source of income to him and inspiration to scores of young artists in Jos-Plateau state and Nigeria as a whole.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES
Research Design and Procedure
This study is historical as suggested by Osuala (1982). The researcher also employed the descriptive and analytical approach in this study. The data for this study was drawn from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include, purposive sampling of artworks, oral interview, interactions with the artist at work and observation. The secondary sources include books, newspapers, exhibition catalogues, internet sources and other literary sources.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis
Field Trips
Visits were arranged and carried out to Udubrae Gallery in Jos. In all these visits, the observation instrument was applied by the researcher to study the modus operandi of the artist, his works and studios/galleries operations. The visits helped to acquaint the researcher of the various other locations some of the works of Udubrae are located, visited and documented for analysis.

Oral Interview
Oral interviews were conducted by the researcher to obtain reliable and valid information on first-hand basis (primary source). A face to face interview was conducted with the artist of the study-Udubrae, on the 31st of October, 2006, using an Audio-tape recorder which was later transcribed to enhance the study. Also, in 2010 and 2016, other interviews were carried out to add to the knowledge of the researcher’s study on contemporary art practice in Nigeria. The open-ended interview question was used to give a copious contribution in the discussion on the history of contemporary art and practice.

Photographs
Photographs of some artworks in Udubrae gallery and other locations where his works were commissioned were taken for the purpose of clarity in the analysis. This approach is to facilitate their discussions.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
This segment contains findings from the field trip to Udubrae Art Gallery in Jos, analysis and discussions of some paintings which span over two decades.

Brief History of Udubrae and His Artworks
Udubrae, Emealereata Ezekiel was born on the 19th April, 1952 at Oghenerurie – Iyede of Isoko North Local government area of Delta State to Mr. and Mrs. Umufurae Udubrae. He started his primary school education at Otor – Iyede Primary school in 1963 and moved on to Ekrovie primary school where he finished in 1969. The change of school according to Udubrae was basically due to his uncle’s constant movements as a headmaster, and also the civil war within that period. He proceeded to Orogun Grammer School in 1970, where he sat for the West African School Certificate in 1974. His passion for education and love for creativity made him to proceed to the College of Education, Benin City between 1979 – 1982 where he studied Fine Arts and obtained a National Certificate of Education (NCE). Before his NCE days, he had been actively involved in the art practice of painting and selling same. In 1978, for instance, he had his first solo exhibition of paintings which was recorded in the Sunday Observer of 1978.

Udubrae’s love for art was noticed early by his uncle, who encouraged him greatly by giving him some incentives to practice. Mr. Sam Adeloye, the then Assistant Director with National Museum, Lagos also encouraged Udubrae’s painting career. In 1994, Udubrae came to Jos to enrol at the Institute of Archaeology and Museum studies where he obtained his Post-Graduate Diploma in Management. He further proceeded to the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma between 2003 – 2005, where he obtained his Post – Graduate Diploma in Public Administration, and also a Master of Public Administration from the same Institution.

Since he joined the National Federal Department of Antiquities in 1975, now the National Monument for Museums and Monuments, Udubrae has served in various capacities as a Clerical Officer,
Assistant Executive Officer (Administration), Museum Education Officer, Senior Museum Education officer and he is currently the Assistant Director, (Education) of the Institute of Archaeology and Museum studies at the Jos Museum, where he is also a lecturer.

Udubrae has contributed immensely to contemporary art development in Nigeria and Plateau State where he currently resides. He has to his credit a number of accomplished professional artworks (paintings) across the country. These include: “Acada”, a mural painting at the Ministry of Education, Iyaro Benin city in 1982, “My People”, also a mural painting at the town hall in Isoko Local Government area of Delta State in 1982, “Antiquities” a mural painting at the museum office in Jerico quarters, Ibadan in 1982, “Alter Piece”, a mural painting at Christ Gospel Witnesses Church Convention Hall at Adigbe, Abeokuta, Ogun State in 1983. Other include “Our Culture” at Afak Art Gallery, Lagos in 1992, and backdrop mural for the natural history museum in Jos in 2001. Udubrae has a commissioned mural painting at the Institute of Archaeology and Museum studies in Jos. All the afore mentioned works are mural paintings executed by Udubrae across the country. While some of these murals indoors are looking well preserved, some of the outdoors murals need some restoration works to preserve the stories and the histories contained in the works.

Udubrae has participated in over thirty five (35) group exhibitions, while he has had over sixteen (20) solo exhibitions to his credit. His doggedness in promoting art led to his receiving the chairman’s award in 1983 during his NYSC days in Oyo State. His paintings are mainly oil on canvas paintings, but he explores other media like veneer on paper and board, water colour and gouache and also creative tie and dye and batik works on fabric. Udubrae’s paintings on canvas are usually heavily impasted, and he paints more with the palette knife than the brush. Yellow cuts across most of his paintings, and the relationship of yellow with blue creates a greenish sensation which characterizes most of his paintings, especially the oil on canvas works.

Udubrae’s insatiable love for knowledge and the propagation of the same has made him participate in many seminars and workshops, which were ingrafted into his many exhibitions within and outside the shores of Nigeria. In 1990, for instance, he attended the International Workshop on Creative Silk Screen printing by Graphic Arts Foundation Rotterdam, in the Netherlands. In 1999 and 2004, he attended the workshop on museum administration organised by the United States Information Service and the National Commission for Museum and Monuments, Lagos, and the Management for Total Result: The Co-operative, respectively. In 2005, Udubrae was an active participant at the Curriculum, Teaching Methods and Skills Enhancement by the Institute of Archaeology and Museum Studies in National Museum, Enugu to mention but a few. It is important to note that, Udubrae produces basically two bodies of work. The first is the oil on canvas or board paintings which are thought-provoking and contemplative in nature and carry messages either in the colour usage referring to moods, gestures, socio-political undertones and religious reflections. He creates works which consist of the everyday miniatures executed in gouache on black paper, they mainly deal with illustrative stories and other subject matter, like social commentaries and political cartoons. These are basically commercialized and serve good decorative purposes.


Udubrae has served in several capacities in the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) through which he has staged several exhibitions to encourage young upcoming artists and to bring contemporary art collections to Plateau State and Nigeria as a whole. He is currently the President of the Plateau state chapter of the SNA. Udubrae is currently into a vibrant gallery practice in Jos, and talking about his works that have gone out and patronage of same as it relates to sales of paintings, he has this to say:
In the area of patronage, if I should enumerate it will be very difficult, because in 1996 when I opened my personal gallery in the museum, I cannot tell you specifically the number of works that have travelled around the globe through the purchases made. I can tell you that within a year, hundreds of my paintings travel and even Professors of art and Medicine and other foreigners give the address of my gallery to friends and clients coming to Nigeria, especially from Philadelphia, all over Europe they come and they know Udubrae’s works and strokes. So, my works have gone far, so I cannot enumerate that this is the number, because a lot have gone out (recorded oral interview with Udubrae, 31st October, 2006).

It is pertinent to note that Udubrae’s art practice has influenced, in no small measure, the acquisition of paintings by Nigerians and expatriates alike which is also part of his salient contribution to contemporary art practice in Nigeria.

Udubrae’s Artworks

The Night Journey:

Plate I: The Night Journey, 1994, oil on canvas. 75cm x 120cm.
Collection of the Artist

This is an oil on canvas painting measuring 75cm x 120cm and was executed in 1994, and it is currently in the artist’s collection in his gallery at the Museum craft village in Jos. This work forms part of the early works in the artist’s collection; it is a multiple figure composition painting showing a nocturnal scene with rocks bordering the painting (Plate I).

From the right to the left sides of the painting, rock boulders are depicted, which move into an outburst of light and energy that reflects on the figures to the middle of the central part of the painting. Five figures are depicted in this painting with two of them carrying some form of load on their heads, as seen in the first and the third figures from the right. The fourth figure is seen holding a stick in his right hand that swings forward. The last figure is also seen in a movement pose. To the left side of the painting, another rock boulder is seen, which disappears into the border. The colours used are basically blues, browns, yellows and orange in their various tones and tints. The upper part of the painting create a form of rhythmic movement towards the source of bright light from the right side of the painting. Balance is achieved through the careful draughtsmanship of the artist by using rocks to stringently balance the composition in a symmetrical style.

This painting depicts movements of people in the dark who are headed for a brighter destination. This painting underscores Udubrae’s philosophy of “life is a journey”, as depicted by people in the dark moving towards a bright light which signifies hope. Life can show some dark sides and also rocky terrains to traverse in order to enter a bright future. The allegory in the painting is potent and in
tandem with the philosophy of the artist. The work was created by alla prima, which shows the speed of creation in Udubrae’s works.

Our Culture

Our culture is an oil on canvas painting executed in 1994 and it is in a private collection with Professor Robert Glew in Mexico. The size of the work is 60cm x 90cm. The painting shows four female figures in an overlapping composition wearing traditional dance costumes from Iyede in Delta State (Plate II).

Viewing the painting from the foreground to the background, one notices two female figures dressed in traditional dance costumes. The figure to the right is seen wearing beads on the neck and around the forehead with a traditional female head dress of the Iyede ethnic group of Delta State. On her right hand she carries a white whisk which is raised. The figure was painted using shades and tints of reds, browns and yellow for highlighting. The wrapper which is tied around the breast region downwards is painted predominantly blue with strokes of red and yellow for contrast effect. The second figure to the left is also similar in colour with the first figure. The faces of both figures are carefully modelled to reveal a contemplative celebration of the people of Iyede in Delta State.

At the background to the left, the third figure which is overlapped by the two initial figures to the foreground shows the same costume style, and also holding a white whisk. The figure shows some form of movement pose in an ecstatic celebration. The fourth figure which is seen in the central upper portion of the canvas is the centre of interest in this composition. The face of the figure wears a hypnotizing effect on the onlooker as if inviting the onlooker to the celebration. The whisk of this figure is emphasized in the painting which shields the other two female figures to the lower part of the picture plane. The downward movement of the whisk creates a rhythmic flow in the painting as all the figure carry the same dance whisk as part of their costumes creating harmony and the heart-love symbol.

The background is painted with brown, yellow ochre, and white to create good support to the foreground colours. The entire picture plane is full of colourful activities and vigorous brush strokes in an impasto style are visibly noticed which gives the work a good textural effect.

In this painting, Udubrae draws the spectator to the vibrant culture in Nigeria as typified by people from his geographical area. It was observed that the artist has promoted several cultural related paintings of various parts of Nigeria. These creations clearly mark Udubrae as a cultural ambassador of Nigeria. People keep memories of even fading cultures as visual arts documents in their collections; keeping history alive and dynamic.
**Doctor at Work**

“Doctor at Work” is an oil on canvas painting executed in 1996. The size of the work is 40cm x 50cm, and it is currently in a private collection with Mrs. L. Dakwo in Jos. (Plate III)

This painting shows a Doctor operating on a patient with an attendant holding up a hurricane lantern with three other figures looking on, and a fourth figure backing the Doctor. In the painting, brown, red and yellow are the predominant colours. Black and Prussian blue are used to create a chiaroscuro effect similar to paintings of the great masters of the Renaissance art period and the story is also similar to Rembrandt’s painting.

A careful observation of this painting reveals that, while the doctor is working on the patient along with other attendants, one of the attendants holds a hurricane lantern to illuminate the room. A light bulb is visibly seen above the head of the doctor without light showing the incessant power failure in Nigeria. In this satirist painting, Udubrae tells the story of the inefficiency of the electricity company in Nigeria even in a situation of a critical surgical operation. Several lives have been lost to such inefficiency in the power sector and other social amenities which the populace should enjoy. Udubrae’s social commentaries are satirical and poignant; making the ordinary man to relate with his creations and statements embedded in them.

**Reflection**

Plate III: Doctor at Work. 1996. Oil on canvas. 40 x 50 cm.
Mrs. L. Dakwo’s collection.

Plate IV: Reflection, 1999. Oil on canvas.
Collection of Professor Robert L. Glew. Mexico.
“Reflection” is an oil on canvas painting executed in 1999 and it is currently in a private collection in Mexico, with Professor Robert L. Glew. The size of the painting is 60cm x 90cm. This is an abstract painting showing a combined technique of brush work and liquidized drip on canvas (Plate IV).

A careful look at the work from the lower portion upward reveals the use of cadmium yellow hue with black to the foreground. This then gives rise to a warm mixture of yellow, oranges and reds with linear representation using white to the middle ground, which carefully fuses into a darker shade of blue, purple and black to the upper top portion of the painting. The left upper register was painted in curvilinear and circular lopped lines in a concentric circle using red, purple and blue. This colours and circle link the eye to the middle ground and then back to the foreground with the use of liquidized drip of black paints, dripped to create the effect of skyscrapers against a sunset back ground. The upward and downward movement of the liquidized paint creates a rhythmic movement in the composition. This is further complemented with the white in an upward movement.

This abstract painting is Udubrae’s registered thought on canvas about life in the city, the circle of life and the ultimate question of what hope lies beyond in a gloomy economy. The painting “Reflection” is a symbolic representation of Udubrae’s thoughts in colours.

**Circle of Life**

Plate V: Circle of life, 2000 oil on canvas 30 x 62.5cm.
Collection of the Artist.

“Circle of Life” (Plate V) which is an oil on canvas painting measures 30cm x 62.5cm. The work which is in the artist’s collection in his gallery in Jos, was executed in 2000. The work is an abstract painting composed of colours, lines and curvilinear forms. The colours used in the painting are few and include red, yellow ochre, green, blue, black and white as accentuating colours. From the lower part of the painting, a triangular-like shape in red, and white with Prussian blue dots to represent the eye and an angular line to indicate the nose. To the right side of the face like depiction, a curvilinear form in yellow ochre and red against a dark background has a white outline and a small circle at the lower left part. This form looks like a foetus in an inverted form. To the left, another large concentric circle is seen painted with palette knife to achieve textural effect and circular dots in a circle formation around a red patch of colour. The upper portion of the painting shows another circular amoebic form executed in red, black, blue and yellow ochre. To the right and the left sides of the painting, white colours and lines are used to accentuate the painting. The background colour on which the work was executed is basically green, white and black to the edges to accentuate the colours. From the top left corner of the painting, liquidized black paint is seen dripped unto the canvas in a random zigzag motion, which almost terminates at the central middle portion. Some of the patterns look like swimming sperm cells, especially the ones to the top left corner.

To my mind, this abstract painting underscores the reproduction process of male and female in a juxtaposed composition. The circles with the reds and dots are symbolic, of the male testicles which produce the sperm cells and the lower portion which serves as the ovaries which keep the foetus during the gestation period. Green is symbolic of growth and fertility, while the black to the edges is
symbolic of death. In this painting, Udubrae used a repetitive motif, colours and lines to achieve harmony and to record the circle of life as it relates to the biological concept of life (conception, birth and death).

**Works on Peace and Conflict Resolution**

Peace is a strong drive in every society and the need to maintain same. Jos, the Plateau State capital was rocked with violent conflicts from 2001. Udubrae as an artist, responded through his paintings on various aspects of the crises was recorded by him. The artists created a large body of works in graphical representation of the gory devastations of the conflicts. Peace and conflict resolution have both negative and positive peace. While some works sue for peace, others show the devastations of houses, charred remains of humans, destroyed biodiversity and several pillages of the war in Jos which has religious, political and economic colourations.

“Homeward Journey” painted in 2002 show some refugees returning to their homes after the crises of 2001. Several other similar paintings with similar philosophy were created from that period onward to address various societal ills.

**Skeleton (Plate VI),** the background of (Plate VI) is painted using blue, white and some warm colours like yellow and orange. The middle ground, which is the focal point of the exhibit, depicts various houses in dilapidated states. The vigorous use of brush strokes and palette knife, shows the spontaneity of the creation of the work. The foreground is virtually bare, and painted with yellows, orange, blues and dark magenta tones.

![Plate VI: Skeleton, Ezekiel Udubrae, Oil on Canvas, 61 x 91 cm, 2010. A collection of Udubrae Art Gallery. Photograph: Researcher.](image)

This multi-coloured landscape painting, x-rays the remains of the conflicts in Jos. The subliminal title of the work, draws attention to the once fleshy landscape with trees and buildings, now in skeletal looking formation. Buildings crumbling from burning, the environment depleted and bare, and a landscape that seemingly should be colourful, is represented in almost abstract forms and shapes. People engaged in conflict situations will draw inferences from Skeleton and have carefully thought, before embarking on destruction and its negative consequences (Onoja, 2017).

**After the Crisis II (Plate VII),** in a similar context, Udubrae captures another conflict in Jos. *After the Crisis II* shows a figure with hands on the head in a wailing and mourning gesture. The other figures depicted in a perspective formation are less defined in gesture. The background displays the chassis of various vehicles burnt and others still burning. Reddish orange to the upper right of the picture plane, yellow, blue and white at the central portion of the composition, and predominantly blue to the right, connotes colour interplay to emphasise contrast.

The foreground to the left of the composition indicates three rock boulders, outlined from the background colours of blues, browns and yellows for highlights, a unique colouring technique in Udubrae’s works. The highlights on the rocks are as a result of the burning of the vehicles at the central portion of the work. The tree to the extreme right, in-between the first and second rock is without foliage. This also is due to the burning caused by the crisis.

This exhibit bears credence to the destruction of the mechanic workshops and car sales stand during the conflicts of Jos. These acts of destruction plunged innocent artisans to poverty and thinking of ways to compensate the owners of vehicles in their custody before the burning. The charred chassis of cars are evident today in many parts of Jos like Zaria Road, Angwan Rukuba, Tina Junction, Bukuru Express in Jos South LGA to mention but a few. All of these charred remains of vehicles are still awaiting government compensations.

The rocks (three rocks) are symbolic of Jos, Plateau State, while the tree without foliage points to the stripping bare of the essentials of life. The leaves of trees produce the food needed for the sustenance of the tree, hence without the leaves, the survival of the plant is bleak. Likewise, removing the means of livelihood from humans in conflict situations, can be traumatic and devastating. The work is a wakeup call to all and sundry, to embrace peace and shun violence and conflicts (Onoja, 2017).

FINDINGS

Udubrae, Ezekiel Emealereta as an artist has been practising for some time now with no scholarly documentation of his works in terms of academic engagement. One of the early literary excerpts on Udubrae was in 1978 as reported in the Sunday Observer, of 24th December, 1978. From that period onward, Udubrae has participated in several solo and group exhibitions to his credit, making his art practice to have spanned over four decades now. His most favoured media of expression is oil on canvas showing the impasto style. His works range from the abstract, expressive and realistic paintings showing consistency in his colour scheme and unique style. Udubrae has made several poignant statements through his artworks which creates a stir to the Nigerian populace and advancement in contemporary Nigerian art.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Going by discussions and some findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced. Udubrae as an artist has most of his paintings in his collection in his gallery in Jos, although a great number of his paintings are in public and private collections, works in his gallery of importance should be collected by the government and displayed in related organizations were such works make related statement and meaning (Onoja, 2008).

The building housing Udubrae’s gallery which keeps his works is quite small, and hence most of the paintings are kept in stacks and not on display. Government and private non-government
organizations (NGO’S) can build a befitting gallery/studio to further encourage the artist into better production of great art pieces. Udubrae has enjoyed great patronages from individual art connoisseurs within and outside the country. Seminars, workshops and symposia should be organized to further expose the art practice of Udubrae and his gallery to Nigeria and the world. This will help bring Udubrae to lime light and encourage all the more private art practice in contemporary Nigerian art. In this study, the researcher has restricted the study to Udubrae’s paintings with oil colours as the predominant medium. It is hoped that future researchers will look into other aspects of his paintings like his gouache, water colour and veneer paintings. And also, the practice of tie-dye and batik works by Udubrae and his wife in his gallery. There are however other practising artists in Jos and these should be studied also to add to a rich and varied literature on the historiography of contemporary art practice in Jos which is the home of peace and tourism.

CONCLUSION
From the analysis and discussions on the artworks engaged with, it was noted that Udubrae has been vibrantly practising art from the late 70’s. This was evident at his first national exhibition at the age of 23 in 1978. He has participated in several solo and group exhibitions and his gallery in Jos serves as a hub and link to the world through his art practice. Udubrae as an artist is aware of some ills in the society and this he has recorded in his paintings. In these paintings, social political and economic commentaries were also underscored. Other paintings deal with his personal philosophy of “life is a journey” and hence in paintings like The Night Journey, show a conscious composition of people in a journey. Udubrae’s technique of painting includes vigorous brush strokes and use of palette knife to create heavy impasto colours on canvas. This is hinged on the fact that he believes that artworks are eternal and should be well finished to stand deterioration.

In summation, it is hoped that this study will serve as a useful guide to researchers on the study of Udubrae and his works and the attendant contributions to contemporary art in Nigeria.

REFERENCES