



Tolulope Sobowale Metal Art Sculptures as Means of Language Communication in Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper focus on Sobowale Tolulope metal sculpture and how he had transformed metal scraps into environmental art and also analyses how the works communicated the language in the society. These scraps are our everyday metal objects which range from automobile parts to utilitarian objects like lantern and electrical generators. His approach to waste aesthetics and environmental management led to creation of magnificent artworks which is embedded in great dexterity. Welded metal art an injection of foreign artistic practice in contemporary Nigerian art scene which has it cream in the 21st century, this artistic practice which is a cross multidisciplinary field of creative exploration that acquaint artist with scientific manipulation of fixating metal together through an electrode of semiconducting device with electrical charges whereby heat and pressure is applied in order to adhere them together. Here, few of his works will be analyzed in terms of themes, styles, ideology and his dexterous capacity in material exploration. Metal sculpture a three-dimensional art which focuses on additive process of sculptural exploration that shows the thing gap between art and science as field of studies with the same offspring, however the term additive process in art is the same as constructive process in science. Sobowale Tolulope indigenous creativity will be

discuss in this paper by adopting descriptive, analytic and evaluative approach as methodology.

Keywords: Metal, Scrap, Art, Objects, Language, Communication, Weld, Sculptural.

1. Introduction

Rejuvenating junks has become an eclectic way of repurposing found metal objects like scraps into art. Scrap metals are rusty pieces of nuts, bolts, iron, spark plug, nails, automobile and motorcycle parts. They are fragment, piece of discarded compact material (an element, compound or alloy) that have typically hard, opaque, and shiny features of good electrical and thermal conductivity. The creation of art from these rusty pieces leaves indelible imprint on the mind of its observers. Ghana, sculptors of the past and present often relied on traditional materials such as wood, cement and clay for production of works. This old practice tends to influence the progress, development and maturity in sculpture. Looking at metal especially its scrap fragments from artistic point of view, it possesses the potential of providing artists with another dimension of material base even with the use of unwanted scraps left overs that seem less important to scrap dealers. Found objects are mostly seen in the

environment such as scrap metals. Artistically, scrap metal art is formed by composition of scrap metals in the environment through methods and techniques such as welding, riveting, gluing and tying.

Art the dexterous exploration of available materials at disposal in the creation of works of aesthetics and discuss in our environment which has it relevance to the society. 21st century art in Nigeria can be seen as a hybrid of various fields, which has therapeutic and conversational function to the society. Adepegba, (2014). viewed art as a social discuss. Sobowale Tolulope metal art is as a result of technical expertise and exposure which gives him a new signature in the contemporary art scene. Donkor, (2018) posited cogent agents that has an effect on artist style which he mentioned studio practice, societal background, exposure and archival knowledge. These are what affect Sobowale Tolulope metal exploration as a genre of contemporary Nigerian art in the up cycling and recycling of repurpose materials of metal objects which birth waste aesthetics, environmental aesthetics and activism. Contemporary Nigerian art surface as result of intellectual practice and experimentation on innovative ways of creating art which focuses on the use of tools and exploration of available materials in creating philosophical works of aesthetics that is deep rooted in African culture. Sobowale Tolulope art is an attempt to revitalize the cream of African culture whereby indigenous art forms, motifs and symbols are explored which elicit his connection to the Yoruba biosphere and as well as his creative exposure which gives him a new ideology about art. Environmental art the catalyst of drawing people into the awareness of their maltreatment of nature that is evident in Sobowale works.

Sobowale Tolulope brings a wealth of diverse working experience to any endeavor, marked by a strong commitment to excellence and a proactive approach to problem-solving. With a proven track record of adaptability and innovation, Tolulope has consistently demonstrated the ability to thrive in dynamic environments, leveraging both traditional methods and emerging technologies to achieve optimal results. Their keen attention to detail, coupled with effective communication skills, enables seamless collaboration across teams and ensures the successful execution of projects.

1.1 Art and Art Education in Nigeria

Nigeria's artistic heritage pulsates with life, intricately woven into the fabric of its culture. From the time-worn traditions passed down through generations to the contemporary voices pushing boundaries, art

serves as a powerful medium of expression, identity, and social commentary. This essay explores the rich tapestry of Nigerian art and the ongoing conversation surrounding art education in the country (Sobowale and Adepegba, 2015).

Prior to European influence, artistic knowledge thrived under a structured apprenticeship system. Masters, often descendants of long lines of skilled craftspeople, meticulously trained students in disciplines like wood carving, pottery, weaving, and metalworking. This system ensured the continuity of artistic traditions, with each creation imbued with cultural significance and ancestral knowledge. The arrival of European colonialism in the late 19th century ushered in a period of change. Colonial education introduced Western art forms and methodologies, leading to a curriculum that emphasized technical skills and a Eurocentric perspective on art. While this shift exposed Nigerians to new techniques and styles, it also devalued the significance of traditional art forms, creating a tension between the established and the introduced (Inwere, 2004).

Today, Nigerian art education grapples with the question of how to bridge this gap and foster a holistic approach. The current system faces challenges such as limited resources, a rote learning emphasis, and the continued dominance of Western art in the curriculum. These factors can stifle creativity and disconnect students from their artistic heritage (Osokoya, 2013). However, a growing movement is pushing for change. Educators and artists are advocating for the integration of indigenous art forms into the curriculum, alongside critical thinking skills and an appreciation for the rich artistic history of Nigeria. This renewed focus on tradition aims to empower students to express their unique identities while engaging with the global art scene on their own terms (Osokoya, 2013).

Nigeria's artistic landscape is a vibrant tapestry, where age-old traditions intertwine with contemporary voices. Art education plays a pivotal role in nurturing this creative spirit. By embracing both the legacy of the past and the possibilities of the future, Nigerian art education can empower future generations to tell their stories through a multitude of artistic expressions (Donkor, 2015).

1.2 Background of Dr. Sobowale Tolulope Oladimeji

Dr. Sobowale Tolulope Oladimeji was born on October 14th, 1972, in Panada Agege, Nigeria. He is a Nigerian national and is happily married to Mrs. Sobowale Folakemi Iyabode, with whom he shares a

beautiful child. Tolulope’s dedication to his family is evident in his commitment to providing for them, as reflected in his address at 76 Olurin Street, Off Ilogbo Road, Oju-Ore, Ota, Ogun State.

From a young age, Tolulope exhibited a passion for the arts, which he pursued with vigor throughout his academic career. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree with Second Class Lower Honors in Fine Arts from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in October 1995. Building upon his foundational knowledge, Tolulope continued his education at the same institution, achieving a Master of Fine Arts (Sculpture) with an impressive grade of 69% in November 2000. His thirst for knowledge led him to pursue a Master of Philosophy in African Art Studies, which he completed with a commendable grade of 61% in November 2015. Tolulope has a Ph.D. program in African Art Studies at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, demonstrating his commitment to advancing his expertise in the field. Despite his academic pursuits, Tolulope remains humble, with awards given to him as the best Ph.D. thesis by Lagos Studies Association at 8th LSA conference 2024.

1.3 Outside of Academic

Tolulope's passion lies in Sculpture and Art History, where he combines his academic knowledge with his innate creativity to produce artworks that are not only visually stunning but also deeply rooted in Yoruba culture and African heritage. His sculptures serve as a testament to his dedication to preserving and celebrating his cultural identity. Sobowale’s journey as a sculptor and family man is marked by resilience, creativity, and a deep love for his craft and heritage. Through his art, he leaves behind a lasting legacy that celebrates the richness of Yoruba culture and inspires future generations to embrace their heritage with pride. As he continues to sculpt his path in life, Sobowale Tolulope Oladimeji stands as a shining

example of talent, dedication, and family love, leaving an indelible mark on both the artistic and personal spheres of his life.

In his pursuit of excellence, Tolulope continues to hone his craft, leaving a lasting impact on the art world and inspiring future generations of artists to embrace their cultural roots and pursue their passions relentlessly.

1.4 Major Exhibitions

T. O. Sobowale (2001). “Rhythms of Ona”, an exhibition of sculpture in various Medium. November 15th – December 7th, National Commission for Museum and Monuments, Ilorin, Kwara State.

International Exhibitions:

T. O. Sobowale (2005). Marziart International Galerie, July 1st- 28th July 2005.

Held at 20259 Hamburg, Germany.

Joint Exhibitions:

T. O. Sobowale (2000). “Best of Ife”. April 26th – May 5th, National Museum, Lagos.

T. O. Sobowale (2002). “Best of Ife”. German Cultural Centre, Lagos. 2002

T. O. Sobowale (2005). “Ife Art School in Retrospect”. A traveling exhibition commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the Department of Fine Arts,

Membership of and registration with professional bodies

Member: Association for the Study of the Arts in Africa and in the African Diaspora (ASAAD) September, 2017

Member: Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) April, 2017

Member, Society of Nigerian Artist (S. N. A) January, 2016 - date

Member: Best of Ife 1995 till date

2. Analysis of Sobowale Tolulope Works



Fig: 1

Title: African Dancer

Medium: Metal

Year: 2010

Source: The Artist

Description: This is a free-standing metal work (three dimensional) that shows an African woman putting on an African native attire (Iro & Buba), Bead on her neck and a traditional hand fan dancing to a song.

The Language Communication: The metal sculpture titled “African Dancer” portrays a woman gracefully dancing to the beat of the gods. The artwork embodies the vibrant essence of African culture, celebrating the beauty and grace of a woman as she adorns herself in traditional attire. With intricate details, the sculpture captures the rhythmic movement of dance, evoking a sense of joy and unity within the community. Through the symbolism of the attire and accessories, it pays homage to the rich heritage and traditions passed down through generations.

Criticism: The elongated forms in the sculpture contribute to a sense of movement but are executed poorly, resulting in distorted proportions that detract from the overall aesthetic appeal. Certain parts of the sculpture appear unnaturally elongated, which undermines the artist's intention to convey grace and vitality. Furthermore, the lack of balance within the composition is evident, with no deliberate asymmetry to create visual interest. The absence of intentional design choices in this regard leaves the sculpture feeling disjointed and lacking in coherence. The artist's failure to achieve symmetry or purposeful asymmetry diminishes the impact of the artwork and prevents viewers from fully engaging with its narrative.



Fig: 2

Title: Cattle Rearer

Medium: Metal

Year: 2008

Source: The Artist

Description: Cattle Rearer is a Fulani man dressed in their traditional native attire not forgetting to carry himself with the happenings in the world by going everywhere with his transistor as he moves around, hereby connecting himself with the world information from his radio holding his stick and their identity hat.

The Language Communication: The Cattle Rearer, adorned in the traditional attire of the Fulani people, embodies a timeless connection between heritage and modernity. With his distinctive garb, he carries not just the physical remnants of his culture but also a profound sense of identity and belonging. In his hand, he grasps a transistor radio, a conduit to the broader world beyond the vast plains where his cattle roam. This simple device serves as a bridge, linking him to the pulse of global events and the ever-changing currents of information. Despite the nomadic nature of his lifestyle, he remains tethered to the happenings of the wider world, ensuring he is not isolated from its rhythms and currents. His staff, a symbol of his role as a caretaker of livestock, is more than a mere tool for guiding cattle. It represents his authority, his responsibility, and his connection to the land. With each step he takes, he is mindful of his duty to protect and nurture his herd, echoing the timeless rhythms of his ancestors. Atop his head sits the iconic

Fulani hat, a tangible emblem of his cultural heritage. Its shape and adornments speak volumes about his lineage, his status within his community, and his sense of pride in his roots. It is a constant reminder of who he is and where he comes from, grounding him amidst the winds of change blowing across the landscape. Together, these elements form a portrait of resilience, adaptability, and cultural continuity. The Cattle Rearer moves through the world with grace and purpose, embodying the timeless spirit of the Fulani people while embracing the flow of information and progress that surrounds him. In his hands, tradition and modernity intertwine, creating a harmonious blend that sustains him on his journey through life's ever-shifting terrain.

Criticism: Consider experimenting with the placement of the figure on the base. Asymmetry or a dynamic pose may enhance the overall composition. Explore alternative base shapes or angles to create visual interest.



Fig: 3

Title: Sisi Ologe

Medium: Metal

Year: 2010

Source: The Artist

Description: This shows a contemporary African lady psychedelically dressed with her hand bag on the right while the left hand is holding an umbrella used to protect herself from the scorching sun.

The Language Communication: This sculptural piece offers a vibrant portrayal of modern African womanhood, blending tradition with contemporary flair. The choice of metal as a medium suggests strength and resilience, echoing the enduring spirit of African women. The psychedelic attire reflects a celebration of color and individuality, perhaps hinting at the diverse cultural influences shaping African fashion today. The positioning of the handbag and umbrella adds layers of meaning to the piece. The handbag, typically associated with personal belongings and identity, symbolizes the modern woman's autonomy and agency. Meanwhile, the umbrella serves as both a practical accessory against the elements and a metaphorical shield, suggesting the need for protection and empowerment in the face of life's challenges, represented by the scorching sun. Overall, your sculpture captures the essence of contemporary African femininity, depicting a woman who is both stylish and strong, navigating her environment with grace and resilience. It invites viewers to ponder themes of identity, empowerment, and cultural expression within the context of modern Africa.

Criticism: To elevate this metal sculpture depicting a contemporary African lady, consider refining details for realism, experimenting with textures, playing with scale, exploring patina options, optimizing display, inviting viewer interaction, and infusing cultural symbolism. These enhancements will deepen the artwork's impact and engagement with viewers, enriching its narrative and visual appeal.



Fig: 4

Title: Fulani Woman

Medium: Metal

Year: Unknown

Source: The Artist

Description: This metal work shows a Fulani woman carrying a big container on her head probably filled with milk as she is Fulani, dressed in their native attire, with some bangles around her wrist for adornment, also holding some piece of clothing.

The Language Communication: This metal art piece captures the essence of a Fulani woman in a poignant and culturally rich portrayal. The central focus is on the woman herself, depicted carrying a sizable container atop her head, and likely filled with milk, a staple of Fulani culture. The choice of metal as the medium adds a robust and enduring quality to the artwork, mirroring the resilience and strength often associated with Fulani women. The woman is dressed in traditional Fulani attire, emphasizing her cultural identity and heritage. This attire typically consists of vibrant colors and flowing fabrics, reflecting the nomadic lifestyle and pastoral traditions of the Fulani people. Additionally, the inclusion of bangles on her wrist serves not only as decorative adornments but also as symbols of femininity and elegance within Fulani culture. The woman's posture and facial expression convey a sense of dignity, grace, and determination, embodying the resilience and perseverance often required of Fulani women as they navigate the challenges of rural life. The act of carrying the container on her head speaks to the practical skills and physical strength needed to fulfill her daily responsibilities, such as providing for her family and community. Furthermore, the subtle details, such as the piece of clothing held in her hand, add depth to the narrative, suggesting a story or context beyond the immediate moment captured in the artwork. Perhaps she is returning from the market, or preparing for a celebration, each possibility inviting viewers to imagine the broader narrative of her life. Overall, this metal art piece offers a compelling interpretation of the Fulani woman's role within her community, celebrating her resilience, cultural heritage, and quiet strength amidst the demands of her daily life.

Criticism: The sculpture features elongated limbs and a slender figure, which creates a sense of movement. However, the composition lacks a clear focal point. The viewer's eye may wander without a central element to anchor it. Abstract art often thrives on ambiguity, but in this case, it might be excessive. The viewer may struggle to interpret the purpose or meaning behind the sculpture. Clarity in conveying intent could enhance the overall impact.



Fig: 5
Title: Fulani Boy
Medium: Metal
Year: 2008
Source: The Artist

Description: This young man is blowing his flute to encourage his cattle graze effectively, when the animals here the sound of the flute, it makes them feel relaxed to graze without fear.

The Language Communication: The metal art piece titled "Fulani Boy" captures a scene of pastoral life with vivid symbolism. The central figure, a young man, is depicted playing a flute, evoking a sense of tranquility and harmony amidst nature. The flute's melodious tones serve a dual purpose: to soothe the cattle and create an atmosphere of peace conducive to grazing. The Fulani people, traditionally nomadic pastoralists, have a deep connection to their livestock, relying on them for sustenance and livelihood. The act of playing the flute not only reflects the cultural practices of the Fulani but also underscores the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals. Through the music of the flute, the young boy communicates with his cattle, fostering a sense of trust and calmness that allows them to graze freely and without fear. Symbolically, the art piece conveys themes of harmony, unity, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. It highlights the importance of understanding and respecting nature's rhythms and the role of human stewardship in maintaining balance within the ecosystem. The Fulani boy emerges as a guardian of this delicate equilibrium, using music as a tool to nurture a sense of serenity and well-being among his herd. Overall, "Fulani Boy" serves as a poignant portrayal of the timeless bond between man and animal, celebrating the age-old traditions of pastoral life while also inviting viewers to contemplate the deeper significance of harmony and coexistence in the natural world.

Criticism: In conclusion, while the artwork "Fulani Boy" conveys a compelling narrative of pastoral life and the boy's role in soothing his cattle through flute-playing, its omission of animals within the composition detracts from its effectiveness in communicating this theme. Incorporating animals into the artwork would have provided a more immersive and emotionally resonant experience for the viewer, strengthening the overall impact and cohesiveness of the piece.



Fig: 6

Title – Cellular Lady

Medium: Metal

Year: Unknown

Source: The Artist

Description: Cellular lady is a contemporary African woman in the new millennium, making all her dealings through the cell phone.

The Language Communication: "Cellular Lady" encapsulates the essence of a modern African woman navigating the complexities of contemporary life predominantly through her cell phone. The title suggests a fusion of tradition and technology, where the artist portrays the subject as both rooted in her cultural heritage and actively engaged in the digital age. The use of metal as the medium adds a sense of permanence and durability, perhaps symbolizing the resilience and strength of the depicted woman. Overall, the artwork offers a commentary on the evolving roles and identities of African women in the 21st century, highlighting their adaptability and empowerment through connectivity. The metal art piece captures her strength and resilience while commenting on the evolving roles of African women in the digital age. It serves as a powerful visual commentary on connectivity and empowerment in contemporary society.

Criticism: As celebrating the beauty and vibrancy of the digital era through its portrayal of a modern African woman immersed in her cell phone. The addition of color to the metal sculpture could further enhance this interpretation, symbolizing the dynamic and colorful nature of the digital world. By incorporating hues reminiscent of digital screens and electronic devices, the artwork could evoke a sense of connectivity, innovation, and energy associated with the digital age. Overall, the use of color in the sculpture would accentuate its message about the allure and impact of technology on contemporary life, inviting viewers to reflect on the beauty and complexity of the digital era.



Fig: 7
Title: Freedom Fighter
Medium: Metal
Year: 2010
Source: The Artist

Description: In the ancient traditional settings, horses was used in battle, this metal work shows a man on a horse holding a sword and ready to slay his enemies.

The Language Communication: "Freedom Fighter" is a metal sculpture that embodies the essence of ancient warfare and valor. Depicting a powerful scene from traditional battle settings, it showcases a man mounted on a horse, poised with a sword in hand, prepared to confront and conquer his adversaries. Through this striking imagery, the sculpture symbolizes the courage, determination, and resolve of those who fought for freedom and justice throughout history. With its dynamic composition and evocative portrayal, "Freedom Fighter" pays homage to the timeless spirit of heroism and resistance against oppression.

Criticism: The lack of balance in the size of the subject on the horse within "Freedom Fighter" raises concerns about the overall composition and effectiveness of the artwork. Addressing this imbalance is essential to ensure visual coherence, clarity of message, and engagement for the viewer.



Fig: 8

Title: Tokotaya
Medium: Metal
Year: 2010
Source: The Artist

Description: Tokotaya shows a couple in a very calm situation dressed in their traditional attire.

The Language Communication: The serene scene captured by Tokotaya depicts a couple adorned in their traditional attire, immersed in a tranquil moment. Despite the absence of any overt action, the composition exudes a sense of profound calmness and harmony. The couple's attire suggests a connection to their cultural heritage, possibly indicating a reverence for tradition and a deep-rooted sense of identity. The absence of any discernible activity in the image invites viewers to contemplate the significance of the moment. It could symbolize a pause in the hustle and bustle of daily life, allowing the couple to reflect on their shared history and values. The peaceful ambiance hints at a bond between the couple, characterized by mutual respect and understanding. Furthermore, the choice of traditional attire adds layers of meaning to the image. It may signify a preservation of cultural heritage, serving as a reminder of the importance of tradition in an ever-changing world. The couple's attire might also symbolize a sense of pride in their cultural identity, contributing to the overall sense of tranquility and contentment. In essence, Tokotaya's depiction of the couple in their traditional attire invites viewers to appreciate the beauty of simplicity and the value of connection—to one's heritage, to one another, and to the present moment. It serves as a gentle reminder to pause, reflect, and find solace in the midst of life's complexities.

Criticism: In critiquing the depiction of the female figure in Tokotaya's artwork, it's evident that there's a discrepancy in the representation of anatomical features between the male and female subjects. While the male figure appears to be well-rendered, capturing details such as posture and possibly muscular structure, the portrayal of the female form lacks similar attention to detail, particularly in terms of anatomical accuracy.



Fig: 9
Title: Wazobia
Medium: Metal
Year: Unknown
Source: The Artist

Description: Wazobia captures the main three tribes in Nigeria, YORUBA, HAUSA and IGBO

The Language Communication: "Wazobia" encapsulates the essence of Nigeria's diversity by symbolizing unity among its major ethnic groups: Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. This term reflects the country's cultural richness and highlights the coexistence and interdependence of these prominent tribes within Nigerian society. It emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity and fostering national cohesion despite differences in language, tradition, and heritage. It underscores the significance of acknowledging and celebrating Nigeria's multicultural identity while promoting harmony and understanding among its people.

Criticism: Consider adjusting the proportions of the elongated figures. Experiment with different heights, widths, and limb lengths to achieve a more harmonious balance.



Fig: 10

Title: Gele

Medium: Metal

Year: 2010

Source: The Artist

Description: This metal works shows a woman tying a gele (Head Tie), putting on a necklace that is being hanged on a wall and she is wearing an attire that covers her two hands.

The Language Communication: "Gele" is a captivating sculptural piece that embodies the elegance and cultural significance of adorning a head tie in Nigerian tradition. Crafted from metal, the sculpture depicts a woman delicately tying a gele, or head tie, with meticulous precision. Alongside this graceful act, she adorns herself with a necklace, the piece hanging on a nearby wall. Her attire, covering her two hands, adds to the sense of ceremonial preparation and attention to detail. Through this artwork, the artist captures the beauty and ritualistic nature of dressing in Nigerian culture, offering a timeless portrayal of femininity, grace, and tradition

Criticism: Looking at this work, the use of principle of design should be introduced into this work in the context of proportion of the head to the body, the artist should make the head more proportional to the body.

3. Conclusion

Dr. Sobowale Tolulope's sculptures transcend mere craftsmanship, embodying profound symbolism rooted in Yoruba culture and the broader African heritage. With meticulous attention to detail, Tolulope infuses each piece with an enchanting allure that captivates audiences in terms of language communication in the society. His mastery of traditional carving techniques is evident in every stroke, earning admiration from both local connoisseurs and fellow artists.

Sobowale brings a wealth of diverse working experience to any endeavor, marked by a strong commitment to excellence and a proactive approach to problem-solving. With a proven track record of adaptability and innovation, Tolulope has consistently demonstrated the ability to thrive in dynamic environments, leveraging both traditional methods and emerging technologies to achieve optimal results. Their keen attention to detail, coupled with effective communication skills, enables seamless collaboration across teams and ensures the successful execution of projects. While his creations are aesthetically pleasing to all, it is the infusion of African essence that truly sets Tolulope's work apart, lending it a sense of authenticity and resonance. His sculptures serve as more than just art; they are living expressions of cultural legacy, destined to inspire future generations. Through his dedication to the craft, Sobowale Tolulope leaves behind a legacy that beckons the admiration and emulation of generations yet to come.

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