



## The Influence of Globalization and Technological innovations on Painting with other Artistic Trends in Nigeria.

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the current trends and influences in Nigerian painting, by groping how modern-day artists and their artistic practices could adapt to the western artistic styles and practices to build a visual language and connection with the western artists by advancing their artworks, and exploring various types of contemporary paintings that emerged in the last decade of this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, it is evident that contemporary Nigeria paintings have a rich historical background that is still significantly shaping the modern expressions of Nigeria painters in terms of instinct, cognition, and creativity in their artistic practices. Moreover, this paper critically — analyzed the key role of how these trends has brought and increased an international exposure for Nigerian artists (painters) and their artworks (paintings) through colonial influence and democratization of art distribution through technology (artificial intelligence) and digital platforms such as international exhibitions, virtual exhibitions, publications, and social media networks. Based on the articulation of this paper, it concludes that Nigerian painters can navigate and intersect their artistic tradition with modern practices — in order to stand the grounds of contributing, competing, and being approved in the stage of global art discourse.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Nigerian Art, Painting, Globalization, Technology, Identity, Modernism.

### 1. Introduction

Nigerian painting space has a lot of classifications with creative connotations that gives an impression of reflecting the hallmarks of her ethnic artistic practices. This is due to the fact that while each group of artists

(painters) explores and inspires each other — several localities retain their distinctive artistic imprints. As a result of that, art forms reflect artists' engagements with nature of their artworks; which are characterized by the synthesis of indigenous traditions such as motifs, patterns, and the fusion of western conventions i.e. perspective and proportion of African art with adaptation of the western world style as propounded by contemporary African artists like Aina Onabolu and the Zairians (Filani, 2005).

However, the Nigerian artistic practices majorly focus on tradition such as power, role and social relations — which emphasizes on the seat of political, social and ritual authority, for a long period of her history. On the one hand, the emphasis on a single part over others in Nigeria painting often affects the nature and navigation of perspectives in indigenous artistic practices. Consequently, the functions of scaling and proportioning painting in Nigeria art society and other extended African countries differ from what is often obtained in western parts of the world. Contextually, the expression of modern artistic practices found among African and Nigerian contemporary artists — apparently dates back to the discourse with “Cubism” artistic styles and expression, and the quest of 21<sup>st</sup> century art theory following the pioneering efforts of the likes of Pablo Picasso and Braque, which later extended to other parts of the world including Africa.

Adeyemi (2011) posits that “the critical connections between African and European arts actually started with the artistic movements inspired through the influences of colonialism”. Filani (2005) corroborates Soyinka’s position — argued that “the dynamism of western education ushered in and informed the artistic

trends, which also led to stylistic changes in indigenous African arts, including the process of acquiring artistic skills". It is equally interesting to note that western influence was behind the teaching and experimental workshops like the *Mbari-Mbayo* in *Osogbo* and *Ori-Olokun* at Ife Art workshop centers that were organized by colonial expatriates and ethnographers. All these were organized to help in disseminating artistic skills to art lovers and students whose talents would not have developed if the artists were limited to the basic elementary skills gained from their school days and from local apprenticeships. This initiative has produced such great artists like Jimoh Buraimoh, Muraino Oyelami and Twin-seven-seven, to mention just a few, who were influenced by the arts and creativity workshops organized by the Europeans.

As pointed out by Adeyemi (2011), Murray's appearance on the Nigerian art scene, was influenced by the creative norms of western academism but more importantly, he was instrumental in the sense that he sought to preserve Nigerian cultures and idioms in the works of his students through his teachings. Murray was able to inspire arts apprentices and students in the area of what Egonwa characterizes or refers to as the artistic desire to 'preserve our culture and philosophy.' Murray equally believes that, it was through the study of indigenous crafts and traditional arts that true contemporary Nigerian arts could evolve. Thus, a classical example of the integration of African and foreign influences in indigenous Nigerian art are the Chinese writings and motifs with infinite variety of characteristics that seems to have come in the wake of western naturalistic representation (Adeyemi, 2011).

In the hands of Nigerian artists, this characteristic Chinese influence, according to Louse and Raymond (1972) is based on traditional brush drawings of symbols representing objects of everyday life. However, the simplicity and directness of older African signs, symbols, motifs, and pattern have given a lot of inspiration to contemporary Nigerian art and artists, individually and collectively at arts schools. The combined influences in the making of modern Nigerian arts and artists are evident in the works of such groups as the Zarianists who experiment with

natural synthesis as seen in the works of Uche Okeke, Bruce Onabrakpeya and Yusuf Grillo to mention a few. Another good example is the *Ulism* group of artists in south –East Nigeria, *Onaism* from south – west and *Arewa* from northern Nigeria. Each of these groups has its distinctive philosophy and artistic ideologies. Particularly, in coastal Yoruba paintings — the primary artistic location and source for a research study often emanate from depths i.e. the meanings of each of the signs, motifs and patterns used by artists, which is derived from a combination of social ritual, class symbols and the desire by artists to communicate both specific and cultural information in a special artistic hermetic language.

However, the Nigerian contemporary painting is an evolving and dynamic genre of art that analytically captures the nation's rich cultural heritage. Thus, this research is a qualitative survey and discourse of the current trends in Nigerian painting, which shall highlight the contribution and efforts of notable contemporary Nigeria artists in Nigerian paintings. Moreover, it initiates a comparison conversation between recent modernized painters, their artistic practices, and their predecessors, by examining the discrepancies, advancements, and the diverse types of artwork that define the contemporary Nigerian painting scene.

#### Painting and Marks

In order to articulate within certain parameters, the foregrounds of painting — firstly, it is imperative to properly determine what painting means since it is called 'painting' rather than images. However, arguments often explain how images over time may extend far beyond other works of art both in two and three dimensions — and as such, it might equally extend to that which is mechanically produced liken as to handmade objects. The form 'arts' or the Fine arts and form of creative art; artists' owe ultimately to Aristotle, who relentlessly accounted for not only painting but also sculpture, drama, and poetry echoing his doctrine of "mimesis" and underpinning the concept of painting as it falls into the set of broad categories, and implicitly form its own distinct objectives in two ways (Aristotle, 2000).



Plate 1 and 2: *Dialogue I, II (Oil on Canvas) 2011, by Kafaru Abiodun*

*These two pieces above are examples of recurrent patterns, signs and motifs which reveal some of the features of contemporary Nigerian painting that this study intends to explore.*

**Painting:** in one sense, has its own uniqueness and there are particular sets of two-dimensional valuables which are hung all over millions of walls across the world including living rooms, public domains, street-boards, lurks in storerooms, and portfolios. To this end, as one finds the (paintings) hung all over the walls — it is expected that either consciously or subconsciously, viewers must notice or find a certain marks on which ostensibly create an arouse form. As one may speculate inscrutably — painting are communes that unites objects and makes us think of them as they demonstrate a certain act of intentions or ‘art’ rather than as a kind of support that does have just a paint on them. Suffice to say that the term painting — is specially a kind of intention made with the feelings of all sorts of manners of creation, which distinguishes flat thing from sort of marked surface, which is from writing photographs and so on. However, if the objects are products, then painting — the specificity that helps ties a set of visual experiences together is a form of practice. As it may deem possible to place a practice as a form of certain unifying principles that coordinate the element of what can be painting through practice at least — it often has some common specific minimal definition in the West: painting is an act involving marking on surfaces with the intentions of creating a visible things or product. Nevertheless, what makes a painting — are forms of subjective ideas of representation, it may equally be painting or form of things that can be seen and at the same time, it may at best be regarded as a “mean” of what is potentially visible to the external world.

To better understand this formulation, one might contrast these intentions against the flat things seen around the practice of art and it is most self-sufficient to offer the intentions of producing the experience of pictorial representation, which the idea goes to

distinguish the business of application of painting to cover or adorn surfaces with marks. However, the definition of painting that sufficiently echoed the effectiveness of the theory of imitating nature is not tenable for the discussion of representation. Again, as painting is a creation of things that shows marks on any surface — while a surface seems relatively unambiguous in the creation of a visible expanse of what stops the passage of light could serve as ground on which painters could replicate the thought or ideas. The form of representing a mark at a given time may become an integral part of painting and while the ‘flat’ surface may seem clear enough to mean a great concern for painters; it may equally be accurate to say that the works of painting habitually reflects the work of the painters as a form in two-dimensional surface.

## 2. Historical Overview of Nigerian Painting

The history of Nigerian painting is a journey of her cultural expression that enlightens young lads in this area of specialization about indigenous practices which was induced by the colonial influence to the post-colonial artistic practices and development. Artist most especially painters in Nigeria, have continuously adapted with this journey by emphasizing on traditional themes, colonial interactions, and also global movements to create a dynamic evolving painting space for this present and upcoming generations. Over the years, Nigeria painters often use their artistic practices to express the in-depth of creativity in which they reflect on the nation’s societal issues with the motive to engage with both their local and international audiences. However, the past few decades have verified that the exhibits of Nigeria painters have gained a significant level of engagement in the global painting space. This makes Nigerian painters known and well respected across the continent

and the world at large. However, to appreciate contemporary Nigeria painting, it is essential to understand its historical roots impact. Nigerian art has a rich heritage that dates back to ancient traditions such as the Nok, Ife and Benin cultures — which are known for their erudite sculptures and metal work. During the colonial period in Nigeria — new art media and techniques were introduced, while post-independence Nigeria saw the rise of modernist artists who blended traditional and western styles (Nnabueze *et al.* 2020).

Over time, Nigeria tradition has evolved, especially during the colonial and post-colonial eras, where the western techniques and materials were introduced, which brought a fusion of traditional and modern styles. This period saw the emergence of pioneer artists like Aina Onabolu and Ben Enwonwu who laid the groundwork for modern Nigerian art that is been experienced today. Nowadays, Nigerian painters continue to innovate themselves, through drawing from the depth of their rich cultural heritage while incorporating global influences and new technologies

to their artistic practices. Notable contemporary Nigerian painters such as Kolade Oshinowo and Abiodun Olaku have made significant contributions to this area of specialization. Their works reflect a blend of traditional themes and modern techniques, and also showcase in diverse form and the dynamic nature of Nigerian painting.

Ideally, this overview scrutinizes the major phases undergone by pioneering artist in the evolvement of Nigerian painting, and it focuses on the shifting of culture and modernized techniques that have shaped and contributed to its development. Art in Nigeria generally has a deep ancient root dating back hundreds of years to the Nok, Ife, Benin cultures and other early civilizations. Although, early Nigeria art was primarily in traditional forms such as sculptures, carvings and constrained painting practices which do have a symbolic meaning with societal and religious significance. However, painting a visual form of expression was in form of murals and body art which were purposeful and integral to the Nigerian ancient cultural and ceremonial lifestyle.



**Figure 1:** Nok culture terracotta. Source: Wikimedia Commons

The advent of colonialism largely imposed a different perception to the Nigeria painting culture — introducing the old folks to fresh western techniques and materials. Contextually, indigenous Nigerian painting was often express through walls murals and body decorations, especially among the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo peoples. Painters as at then used natural pigments from plants and minerals to create symbolic patterns and designs that adorned homes, temples and communal spaces.

### 3. Colonial Influence and the Introduction of Western Techniques

The era of the colonial masters brought significant changes in Nigeria’s art — they introduced the western concepts and artistic techniques to build on, and also paintings materials such as oil colours, canvases, and brushes amongst others (Effiong, 2025). However, these western material and techniques built along; through concepts of realism with perspective, which introduced pioneering Nigerian artists to new creative possibilities (Adeyemi, 2024). During this

period, Nigeria art saw the emergence of her pioneering artists like Aina Onabolu, Ben Enwonwu, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Kolade Oshinowo to name a few — these artists sought to infuse their indigenous concepts with that of the colonial masters in their artistic practices. This emergence made Nigerians opened to receiving formal trainings and education in western art schools, either locally or internationally, which eventually led them to began experimenting with new methods and blending them with western artistic styles. By the way, colonial patrons often commissioned Nigeria pioneering artists to create portraits or scenes that match with European taste in Mind.

Nigeria’s independence in the year 1960, made her artists sought to re-imagine and redefine their cultural

identity in their artistic practices by moving absolutely away from pure western styles and reclaiming their heritage in distinct action of creativity and products (Adebowale, 2023). However, the post-independence era marked a significant pattern and shift in Nigerian painting. Painters began exploring diverse vibrant themes that contains contents of self-identity; nationalism, and social transformation. This made an association of young artists that was founded in year 1950, called the Zaria Art Society (ZAS) or Zarians — play a crucial role in this transformation by using their works to advocate for fusion of African traditions and modern artistic practices. Also, prominent members like Uche Okeke, Yusuf Grillo, and Bruce Onobrakpeya developed unique styles that incorporated local motifs and narratives with contemporary techniques.



Plate 3 — *Ijala (Hunters Guilds)* (Mixed-Media on canvas) by Abiodun Kafaru, 2013

*Ijala is a mixed-media painting — that evokes the spirit of hunting and songs among the guilds of hunters. The work in this picture is designed with sand, ropes, wood and oil paints, while the ropes are specifically arranged to show the profile display of the guilds in a colorful hue. The hues are well selected in a systematic manner to represent the hunters, while the inner orange-red denotes the head or leader of the guilds. The inner miniature painting placed strategically at the middle of the picture represents fire set by the guilds, and the power of fire carried by the hunter connotes spiritual powers. The edges of the painting are specially decorated; sand is decorated with patterns and motifs typifying of the embroidery design of the ancient time among the Yoruba.*

The contemporary art setting in Nigeria is intensely influenced by the impulse of globalization, which makes things easy in terms of inter-cultural interactions and exposure of artists to huge number of global and evolving artistic techniques, skills, innovation, and standards (Effiong, 2023). This engagement does not only enrich their creative process but also open doors for broader discourse with the international art community. Furthermore, given the rise and advancement in modern technology, most especially this late 21<sup>st</sup> century social media and other sophisticated digital platforms have transfigured the mindsets of artists, how they think and distribute their works. Also, this revolution provides them with an extraordinary opportunity to gain the engagements of global art audiences and engage directly with art enthusiasts and art lovers around the world.

#### 4. Contemporary Nigerian Painting and Trends

Currently, Nigerian paintings have improved vigorously and also, it is a vibrant union of diverse influences and techniques. Many artists keep exploring non-representational forms, focusing on abstract concepts that prioritize emotional depth and personal storytelling over literal depiction. Recently, the swift developments in Nigeria painting is showcasing intensification, transiting towards different forms of modern art (painting) such as the figurative, abstracts, mix-media, and digital art. And these growths, grants artist (painters) the freedom to get inclined with intricate emotions and dynamic philosophical ideas without the constraints of emphasizing on realistic representations only but also the chance to explore to the peak other phase of dimensional art particularly related to painting. For Instance, there is a notable movement towards mixed-media experimentation, resulting in artworks that are rich in texture and subjected to multiple visual complexities. Similarly, the integration of digital technologies is also reshaping the art scene largely,

giving rise to innovative forms such as virtual installations and interactive experiences that engage viewers in the new and dynamic ways (Agwu, 2023). The diverse forms of contemporary paintings and artistic practices are itemized and discussed below:

Mixed-Media/Collage and Experimental Techniques — Mixed-media and collage have increasingly become prevalent in contemporary Nigerian painting. However, by incorporating different materials and textures. Painters are exposed with this medium to create complex multidimensional works that challenges the traditional notions of painting. Nevertheless, this approach allows for the exposition of greater creativity and experimentation which eventually result in unique and visually striking pieces. Contextually, this approach involves the combination of traditional painting materials with other unconventional or recycled materials like fabric, metal, and found objects, resulting in rich, tactile pieces. Amazingly, this trend reflects a broader move towards interdisciplinary art practices, where the boundaries between different art forms are blurry to audience that does not have knowledge of art.



Plate 4 and 5 — Untitled Mixed Media on wood 2012, by Abiodun Kafaru

*Approaches adopted in these two plates of this artwork are systematically wet on wet style rendered with rope stuck on the surface of wood panel, primed with glue intentional bearing in mind that the experiments may open up drastic shift in studio art practice and in the quest for innovation in this research. Ultimately, the work is indeed a probe into several claims made on behalf of modernist paintings and materialism made by the likes of Bells, Collingwood and Cezanne. The researcher intentionally infused this material with the belief that new concept and reading would or may emanate and to see how this work will look when mounted for the viewers.*

Abstract Art/ Non-Figurative Art — In Nigeria painting, abstract still remains a significant trend in contemporary Nigerian art. Aesthetically, this form of painting is characterized by emphasizing on color, formation, and texture. Interestingly, this style often allows painters to express their complex emotions and ideas while drawing on personal and cultural experiences. Abstract works are established to challenge viewers either artists or non-artist to interpret and engage with art on a deeper level that goes beyond literal representation. Surprisingly from the past decade till

date, abstract is one of the dominant trends that are observed in contemporary Nigerian painting. This style emphasizes the dynamic force of color, form, and texture over realistic representation; these mediums allow artists (painters) to freely convey their emotions and thoughts. The sensation and inspiration behind Nigerian artist choice of being glued to Non-figurative painting can be subjected to the influence of globalization in art—that is increasing the exposure to international art space. Whereby encouraging upcoming painters to experiment with abstraction, resulting in art works which can both be innovative and deeply personal without the fear of any art critic.



Plate 6 and 7 — Excitement pastel and Acrylic on Paper 2011, by Abiodun Kafaru

*The dialogue that has been happening between western and African artists since Cubism e.g. Picasso looking at African art forms and then the African artists looking at western arts style' such as realism (e.g. Picasso) and how this is interpreted will be investigated in my art practice. The reflection, dialogues and interpretations coming back and forth from western and modern Nigerian arts will be investigated through creative processes in drawings and paintings.*

Figurative/Portrait Art — Figures and portraiture is still significantly the face of painting in Nigeria, which continues to be popular among Nigerian painters. This is due to the fact that this works is attractive and relatable because they often depict day-day social life activities like cultural rituals and notable figures. Figurative art provides a visual narrative of Nigerian society in various contexts, and Nigerian painters has several approach to this form of painting, ranging from realism, hyper-realism to styled and expressive forms that reflects the diverse nature of their artistic voices.



Plate 8 — Yoruba Traditional Dancers [Oil on Canvas] 2005, by Abiodun Kafaru

*These women often appear to be wading through shallow coastal settings, suggesting a ceremonial or festive procession. Their steps are always coordinated and soft but they deliberately sway off their garments to convey rhythm, which is accompanied by unseen drumming and singing.*

**Digital Platforms and New Media Art** — As time is evolving, new opportunities are emerging and strategically; Nigerian artists are now exposed to fresh technological advancement of this 21<sup>st</sup> century and this era has given artists particularly painters the privilege to use digital tools to innovatively create, manipulate and sell or project their creativity, talent, enthusiasm, and intuition to the wider audience both locally and internationally through online platforms, virtual galleries, and social media. This contemporary technological setup has begun to redefine how art can be marketed, sold, and appreciated. In fact, social media networks like LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and art-focused website have become a global marketplace, and it is actively utilized as a swift social archive for the art market without relying solely on physical galleries (Deng, 2023).

**Virtual and Augmented Reality** — In the last few years of this decade artificial intelligence (AI) and other machine orientated technologies have taken control over all manual instruments; and are used swiftly to carrying out day-to-day activities across all facet of diverse disciplines, including the art. These machine-oriented technologies have opened new dimensions in the art world particularly in painting, graphics, and photography. Currently, majority of the young Nigerian painters are beginning to explore the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for generating concepts and ideas to create enticing artworks that allow viewers to experience art in innovative ways.



**Figure 2:** An example of an AI-generated Painting

**Globalization** — The profound impact of globalization on Nigerian painting is overwhelming; it has exposed artists (painters) to a wide range of incorporating the international standard styles and techniques alongside theirs; in the materialization of great works of art (Onwuagboke, *et al.* 2015). Therefore, while these painters maintain a unique Nigerian cultural identity, this cross-cultural exchange conclusively shall strengthen the foundation Nigerian art is built on, while leading them to adapt internationally.

**International Exhibitions and Collaborations** — A significant progress Nigeria painting experienced in this late 21<sup>st</sup> century is the exposure gained by showcasing artworks at international venues. This exposure promotes collaborations amongst artists around the world. These platforms also offer recognition and also encourage the habit of exchanging ideas and techniques (Momaa, 2023). To an extent, this opportunity has enriched the creative processes of Nigerian painters. Hence, international

exhibitions so far, have allowed Nigerian artist to reach a wider audience and colleagues and gain constructive critical acclaim that contributes to the global appreciation of Nigerian painting.

**Identity and self-Expression** — Identity or self-expression is literally a central theme in the face of Nigerian contemporary painting. However, artists must be able to explore personal and collective identities, which often reflect on their cultural heritage, gender, and social roles. Through their works, painters navigate questions of selfhood and belonging, creating prices that resonate with diverse audiences.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper is a discourse of the evolution of Nigerian painting, which is a reflection of her journey through tradition, colonialism, independence and modernization. Thus, it encompassed from the early

use of symbolic patterns in murals to the sophisticated fusion of cultural elements and global techniques — exposing to readers how Nigerian painting has developed into a unique and respected art form, stating how the pioneering contemporary artists, from the set of Aina Onabolu to Bruce Onobrakpeya's and this modern-day artists (painters), played significant roles in shaping this evolution, while also leaving a legacy that modern artist continue to build upon. Hence, the current trends and influences in Nigerian painting is a vibrant and dynamic art scene that continuously evolves in response to global and technological changes.

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