

CHIKE ANIAKOR: MASTER OF POETIC LINES

WOLE OLOIDI

(Received 26 November 2010; Revision Accepted 9 February 2011)

ABSTRACT

There are numerous ways of expressing creativity- verbal and non verbal. The artist expresses himself the way he sees things, using diverse ways of expressing it. One of those ways is what Aniakor uses to speak to humanity. As an artist, drawings are used to relay a message through the arrangement of lines to form a composition. As a poet, the ability to relate the use of lines to poetic interpretation sends more messages to the erring listener. In art, non verbal communication through drawings and poems, have gained grounds in the area of communication. The rationale for this paper, is not to solely discuss the artist, but mainly to show case what the society in time past had gained through this approach and what the present generation stands to benefit from his message through Drawings and Poetry.

KEYWORDS: Communication, Artist, Drawings, Poetry, Society.

INTRODUCTION

Lines can be used in many different ways depending on the intent and the style of the artist. Most artists have developed unique but expressly mystical ways of handling and commanding their lines to submissive obedience. Mittler and Howze (2000) say that the lines therefore, have become the major instrument used in creating drawings. As true as this postulation may be, it is very clear that the most prominent determinants of an artist's drawing style are his/her experiences. Therefore, in order to have a fuller grasp of an artist's drawing style, one needs to access his/her social experiences, which have shaped the manner and type of lines the artist draws with. What this paper intends to do is explore the life and drawings of Chike Aniakor, one of Nigeria's well-known artists.

Chike Aniakor, an artist, poet and philosopher is a graduate of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and a retired professor from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In quest for further knowledge in his formative years, he left Nigeria for the University of Indiana, United States of America. There he had many artistic and intellectual outings, which have been graciously acclaimed by scholars around the world. He has had numerous art shows where some of his paintings,

drawings and poems have come to lime light. He is a fellow of the Rockefeller Awards – a prestigious and academic award he got in recognition of his hard work.

In his visual representations, he creates the balance when he combines his verse and drawings. According to him, "an idea struck me with regard to my poems. Which I have always kept like a hen watching her brood" (*personal communication* 2010). He further emphasizes that these poems have always remained silent voices behind his paintings. When he became a lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, his drawings and writings appeared in numerous art magazines, journals, local and international. Among these are drawings, which explain poems or, more precisely, poems that interpret the drawings. Some of his poems supporting drawings or drawings supporting poems are: *These voices Again! And In Silence I wait*. These are powerful and provoking artistic renderings. In these poems, he makes good use of African motifs to represent the way Africans communicate with highly symbolic figures powerfully rendered. The motifs also depict the African nature of obedience and humility – this can be seen in the lines of the poem, in silence I wait. The linear images as arranged clearly show the cultural interaction and aesthetic marriage of forms and movement.

Wole Oloidi, Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

According to his diary – which he refers to as “jottings that represent the cobweb that the spider has woven” – he loves taking his time to produce any piece of art or poem.

Like all artists, Aniakor uses diverse social experiences as components to visually express himself and communicate to others. Chike Aniakor communicates through his drawings and poems, using a range of visual vocabularies that have found their ways into his creative domain. Like other Nigerian artists like Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Udo Ema and many others, Aniakor’s ability to give mysterious visual interpretations to his drawings calls for reflective reasoning on the part of audiences that wish to understand the impact of his works. Having started his artistic crusade as a secondary school teacher, he made a mark through his creative intellect, which made it possible to convince the entire community that art remains the corner stone of development. He succeeded in this mission and creative vision through intense natural vigor that allowed and encouraged practical demonstrations by the pupils. As he puts it, “I always encouraged the pupils to produce artworks, which they show to their parents as a conviction that art has gone beyond people’s negative notions” (personal communication 2010). Like all great artists,

Aniakor has refused to be restricted to a single medium of communication. Rather he has employed not only lines but also colour and rich proverbial text exemplified in his poetry.

Chike Aniakor: Penning Down Visual Poems

According to Edwards (2000) the traditional method of looking at the past is only one approach that the philosopher brings to his reflections upon drawings, which go beyond the shores of mere creating any work of art. Thus, scholars have insisted that art is an affair for artists who not only want to reflect that world but to change it. Aniakor does not joke with perspective as accuracy is his watch word. Crawshaw (1986) said to some people, perspective comes naturally and to others, it is a hard work. In this sense, it is the role of artists to philosophically define in all dimensional forms, the ideas, concepts and creative language of whatever medium, as a way of critiquing or defining new directions in society. From an analysis of his works, this critiquing and search for new order in society is what Aniakor stands and lives for. He also believe in visual interpretation of ideas, which is equally supported by Mittler and Howze(2000) by saying that the visual vocabulary is as vital to the artist as the written vocabulary is to the poet.

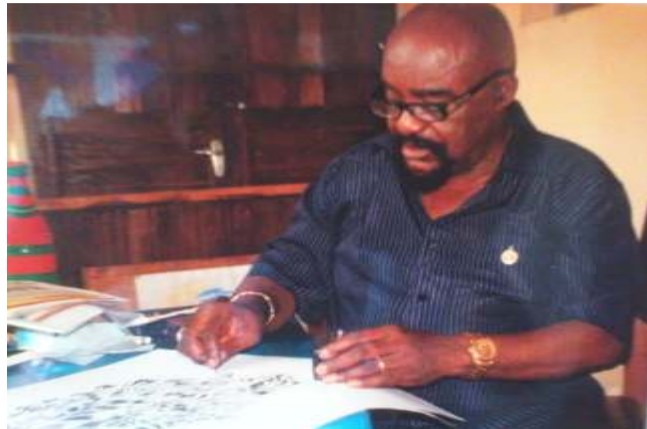


Plate 1: Chike Aniakor at work

Chike Aniakor has made thousands of artistic works in his career, ranging from painting drawings, poems and a host of others. In all his works, one obvious characteristic is their poetic

nature – not just in terms of their meanings but in the manner in which he manipulates the medium. To illustrate his poetic style, we shall analyze four of his contemporary works, which address

political, economic, social and religious aspects of our society (Plates 2-5).

1. Templates Of Memory

The medium Aniakor used for this work is broomstick and ink, creating very imaginative effects that seem like those made by brush and ink. The work measures 60 cm by 50 cm and is made on paper. Templates of memory describe the historical documentation of Nigerian events. It explains the tension that ravages the country

despite which the country still stands in the turbulence of our diverse political feelings. The lines are as tender and insignificant as they may appear in a drawing and the white spaces in between the bold strokes create a binding tie that achieves a unified visual and poetic whole. In totality, the rendering exhibits the professional expertise in the artist by using lines to narrate social reality and communicate the artist's perspectives to the society.



Plate 2: Templates of Memory
Medium: Broomstick and black ink on paper
Size: 60 cm by 50 cm

2. The Poverty of Oil Well

There is no one social problem that vitalizes Nigeria today as the issue of oil in the Niger Delta. Aniakor's lines have not missed this topical issue. Aniakor's The Poverty of Oil Well is a drawing that depicts the degree of desperation among Nigerians today, which makes them seek to make two opposing ends meet. On the one hand is the fact that people in political offices and leadership positions are engaging in oil bunkering while, at the same time, they deny vast millions of Niger Delta access to the development al

benefits that the wealthy can bring if the nation's wealth is judiciously utilized for the citizenry. This is the paradox that Aniakor's drawing analyses in a way that shows that the nation is heading towards a serious political and economic doom if the situation continues unabated and exacerbated by environmental pollution and other ongoing social hazards. Measuring 62 cm by 50 cm, Aniakor's Poverty of Oil Well uses broomstick and ink to discuss the nation's critical oil-related problems.

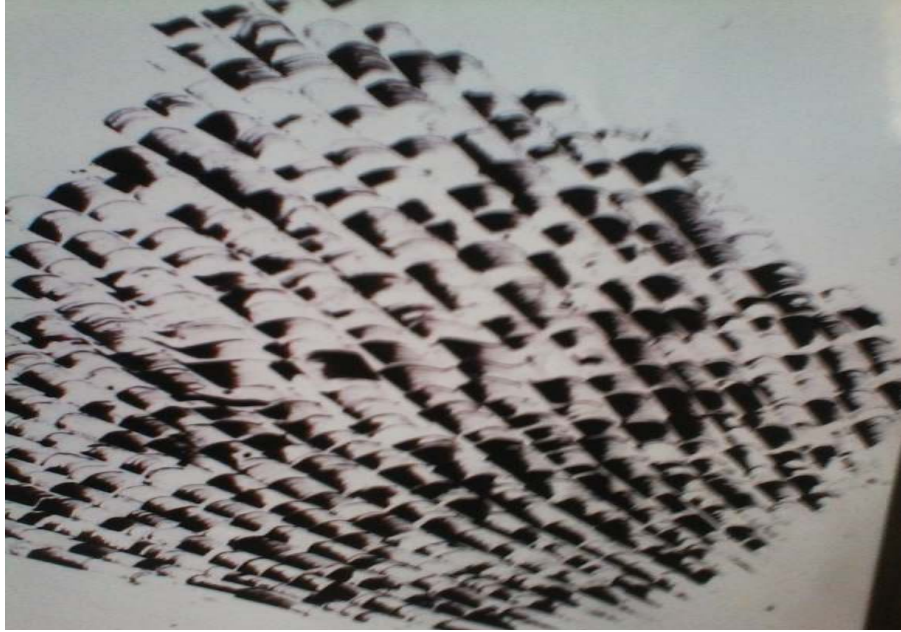


Plate: 3: The Poverty of Oil Well
Medium: Broomstick and black ink paper
Size: 62 cm by 50 cm.

3. The Politician on the Prowl

Measuring 60 cm by 50 cm, the medium of this art work is also ink on paper. The politician on the Prowl is a commentary on the Nigerian political class and its desperation to amass wealth through dubious means. As in Aniakor's ink drawing, we see the politician dressed in elaborated decorated and flowing agbada after a winner-takes-all round of politicking. The

Nigerian politician is always moving up and down thinking of no other thing than to cart away the nation's wealth. The survival of the nation is neither his priority nor ultimate concern. In this ink drawing, the artist has clearly unraveled the definition of civil rule in Nigeria as a civil waste, in which the masses get poorer and the elite get richer.



Plate 4: The Politician on the Prowl
Medium: Broomstick and black ink on paper
Size: 60 cm by 50 cm

4. **The burden of our Stories**

This is a highly philosophical drawing by Aniakor. In the postcolonial African context, there are legion of problems ranging from shelter, food, education, security, healthcare services, transportation and other related social necessities of life which, unfortunately, are

absent. These have created a lot of burden in man as shown in Aniakor's burden of our stories also rendered in ink on cartridge paper. According to Edwards{ 1989} she said even Picasso could hardly have expressed a feeling with greater power than that.



Plate: 5: The burden of Our Stories

Medium: Ink on cartridge paper

Size: 62 cm by 50 cm.

In a way, as may be inferred from plates 2-5, Aniakor's work are biological in that they seem very alive in thematic relevance, lines colours, meanings and philosophical extensions. It is Trevor (1986) that sees the human creature as biological in nature, as with other mammals, the normal young of the species are born with potential to function effectively in a world where the five senses are vital. As a biological creature Aniakor's works are like his creative offspring that are made, in a matter of speak, with great potentials to function in our contemporary context in a meaningful way. Also, in using broomstick rather than the usual pen or brush, Aniakor makes lines that script the dexterous essence in his human nature by using a narrow domestic object to create a visual metaphor for wider national subjects.

In the quest for further artistic innovations, Aniakor has broken away from the conventional approach to rendering. His drawings have been contagious to younger generations of

artists. Both the medium and styles of his rendering have broken away from the norm. it is the increased tempo of social and artistic change in the contemporary world that have vitalized what is reflected in the variety of art styles that have emanated from Aniakor's persistence search for new ideas and innovations. Not only has he searched for new ideas, he has also found his own secrets of drawing. As can be seen in Aniakor's drawings in plates 2-5 above, insignificant materials like broomsticks have perfected the duty of brush stokes and pen renderings. In using broomsticks to draw, Aniakor has found an unfamiliar use for a familiar cutlural object. These drawings are delineation of forms upon a surface, usually a plane, by means of lines and tints or shading. These forms delineated in Aniakor's drawing, may be visible objects, imagined forms presented as if they are actually seen, or purely arbitrary, sometimes in abstract forms. Aniakor's drawings posses a kind of freshness or youthfulness that one finds in the

much energetic works of children. As analyzed by Stansfield (1973), young children draw pictures in their mind; they do not look at a model unless their attention is specially attracted to it (28). Aniakor's drawings stem from a rich and imaginative mind, which is experienced and can reproduce society without necessarily having to gaze upon social happenings in our political, economic, moral and philosophical world.

Through Chike Aniakor's teaching career at the university of Nigeria, Nsukka, he won the hearts of students for two major reasons. The first being his highly developed and gifted draughtmanship, which made him develop the habit of drawing among or with students while having drawing classes. Even in retirement and his contract teaching at the cross river university of technology, Calabar, he still takes joy in drawing with his students as a means of encouraging them and also to teach them through practical demonstration.

Secondly, Aniakor taught students how to develop independent drawing techniques with

mature themes. This, to him, was to make them develop the art of poetic drawings. In drawing, Aniakor does not spare the use of lines because, according to him, there lays the secrets of rendering using the principles and elements of drawing to create poetic images. Valadon (1999) insists that although one needs not put suffering in drawing one still has nothing without pain. This what drives Aniakor to take the pain of drawing with his students. According to Aniakor (2005) the essence of life is hidden in mysteries we cannot comprehend and art has to penetrate this mystery. In his quest to penetrate the mystery of life with poetic images and through interaction with his students, Aniakor has taught, groomed and influenced contemporary visual artists like Osa Egonwa, Chris Echeta, Olu Oguibe, Onoura Chijoke, Gozie Ufodike, Uche Onyishi, to mention just a handful. Like all great artists, Aniakor's creative ideas have matured with time, like the sprout of yam, seedlings, the full import of which can be seen in his two rendered poems below:

IN SILENCE I WAIT

Come to me in silence if you can,
 Like ripples of water from yesterday's
 Rain,
 Like a fallen tree anchored on the lap of
 Echoes of desire,
 With faulty steps...
 Twin companions of a new dance;
 Like a new moon sickled on your sky
 décor.
 Ada Ugo-daughter of partridge,
 Palm oil that melts in the sun,
 Here I stand, spindle in hand lost in your
 Misty shadow,
 A waiting my turn before the communal
 Pot Oje na Mmuo.

THESE VOICES AGAIN!

Will they never cease?
 These voices that trail like these attendant
 upon a beggar's ulcer
 Will yesterday's child be born again
 or does the stench of memory stiffen your
 stout discipleship?
 Your frenzies mark the pulse time.
 And I the corpse of its mute music.
 Is your quickened pulse the maiden spirit
 of time?
 Either a thousand suns shall wipe your
 shadows
 Or your obsequies shall be the ablutions of
 my Ikenga.



Plate 6: These Voices Again
Medium: Pen and ink on paper
Size: 30 by 20 cm



Plate 7: In Silence I Wait
Medium: Pen and ink on paper
Size: 30 by 20 cm

REFERENCES

- Agba, J. U., 2006. Radio and Community Theatre in Rural Development, Calabar: Jamel
- Ajibade, Babson, Bojor Enamhe and Wole Oloidi., 2011. "is Fine Arts Inevitable Requisite for Bachelors Degree in Visual Arts? Notes from the Admission Policy of a Nigerian University". Research paper submitted for publication in Cultural Trends,
- Ajibade, B and Lawson, I., 2003. "The Limitations of Teaching and Learning Fine and Applied Arts at the Tertiary Level in Cross River State: Calabar Metropolis". Global Journal of Educational Research 2, (1&2): 27-32.
- Akinyemi, Akintunde., 2003. e. "Yoruba Oral Literature: a Source of Indigenous Education". Journal of African Culture Studies 16, (2):
- Anijah-Obi, F. N., 1993. Community process in Environmental Education, University of Calabar, Module IV.
- Awobuluyi, O., 1971. "On the structure of aro". African Notes 7, (1): 59-69.
- Brieger, P, Vickers, G. S and winter, F. E., 1970. ART and MAN. Canada. Holt, Rinchart and Winston.
- Canaday, John. (1988) What is Art?. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Egbe, C. A., 2000. Role of Traditional Communication in The Effective Implementation of Environmental Education (AWARENESS) in Nigeria. A paper delivered during the Tropical Environmental Forum (TEFO) Conference, The Polytechnic, Calabar.
- Fadipe, A. O., 1987. The Sociology of the Yorubas, Ibadan. University of Ibadan Press
- Crawshaw, A., 1986 Learn to Sketch. London, William Collins. Edwards, B.(1989) Drawing on The Right Side of The Brain. U S A, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.
- Edwards, B., 1989. Drawing on The Right Side of The Brain. U S A, Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.
- Ewy, Christine Allen., 2003. Teaching with Visual Frameworks: Focused Learning and Achievement Through Instructional Graphics Co-Created by Students and teachers. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press,
- Lievrouw, Leath. A., 2008. Communication: An Introduction-Microsoft Encarta
- Mittler, G. A and Howze, J., 2000. Creating and Understanding Drawing.Ohio, Mc Graw Hill.
- Obadiogwu, C., 2004. Beyond the Fourth Wall: Issues and techniques of Producing Community Theatre for integrated Human Development. Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol. V. March UNIZIK.
- Olatunji, O., 1984. Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry. Ibadan: University Press,
- Olunlade, T. A., 1987. The Themes in Yoruba Children's Poetry. Nigerian Magazine 55, (4):
- Oyesakin, A., 1983. "Categories and Functions of Yoruba Orai Poetry for Children". Nigeria Magazine 51, (146): 62-72.
- Pearce, B., 1992. Communication and the Human Condition. U.S.A: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Saunders, D., 1976. Visual Communication Handbook. London: Trinity Press.
- Sola, E. O., 1988. An Effective study of Family Planning Communication in Rural Ogun State Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan.