

**RETHINKING, RE-THEORISING THE CONCEPT OF MODERNISM IN  
PAINTING AND ITS AFTER-EFFECT ON AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY ART  
DISCOURSE**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores both the European and African concepts of Modernism and its modernity in painting. The idea is to re-examine and re-theorise the understanding of this concept with a view to finding out its true import and impact on the contemporary art scene, especially that of Africa. The works of two African artists are reviewed and discussed excluding the painting of Paul Cezanne which has birthed this argument. Finally one of the authors introduces his own paintings to help buttress their position and the theorisation of personal understanding of Modernism in painting culture. The paper concludes by advancing a re-theorisation and understanding of the concept of modernism in Africa, so that a new understanding could be realised in developing new awareness of what Modernism stands for within contemporary African art discourse.

**Key words:** Modernism, Contemporary art Discourse, Paul Cezanne, Re-theorise, Re-thinking

**Background to the Study**

According to Irokanulo (2014), the basic characteristic of the European modern period was its emphasis on science and technological advancement because of the industrial revolution sweeping across Europe in the nineteenth century. It was also a period of theoretical assertions. Gardner (2005) advances that most of the developments in the sciences and social sciences have their roots in this period.

Theorists like Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) propounded most of the theories that revolutionised this period. Charles Darwin (1809-1913) theorised the concept of evolution which suggests mechanistic laws, rather than attributing evolution to

a random chance or God's plan. He further argued for a competitive system in which only the fittest survives.

Modernism developed in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe. *Modern* in the context of modernist artists, then and now, often seeks to capture the images and sensibilities of the artists' age. However, modernism goes beyond simply dealing with the present and involves the artist's critical examination of reflections on the premise of art itself. Modernism thus implies certain concerns about art and aesthetics which are internal to art production, regardless of whether or not the artist is producing scenes from contemporary social life.

The modernist period is often discussed in terms of contrast to academic art which is traditional. The modernists are referred to as those who have rejected laws of established academic art or tradition which can be found with the British and French and seek refuge in daily common things or issues provoking imageries and human sensibilities. What then is this Academy? The term is used to refer to art sanctioned by the established art schools such as the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in France (founded in 1648) and the Royal Academy of Arts in Britain founded in (1768). Both schools provided learning and sponsored exhibitions. They had laws guiding what they accepted as artwork and most times, what they accepted conformed to the Hegelian understanding of Art as sublime. The modernist artists rejected this guiding law and began to explore contemporary images that had no history or even cultural value attached to them. This was clear through their actions, as they rather accepted art as a mirror which reflected day to day phenomena which can be seen in the paintings of Courbet.

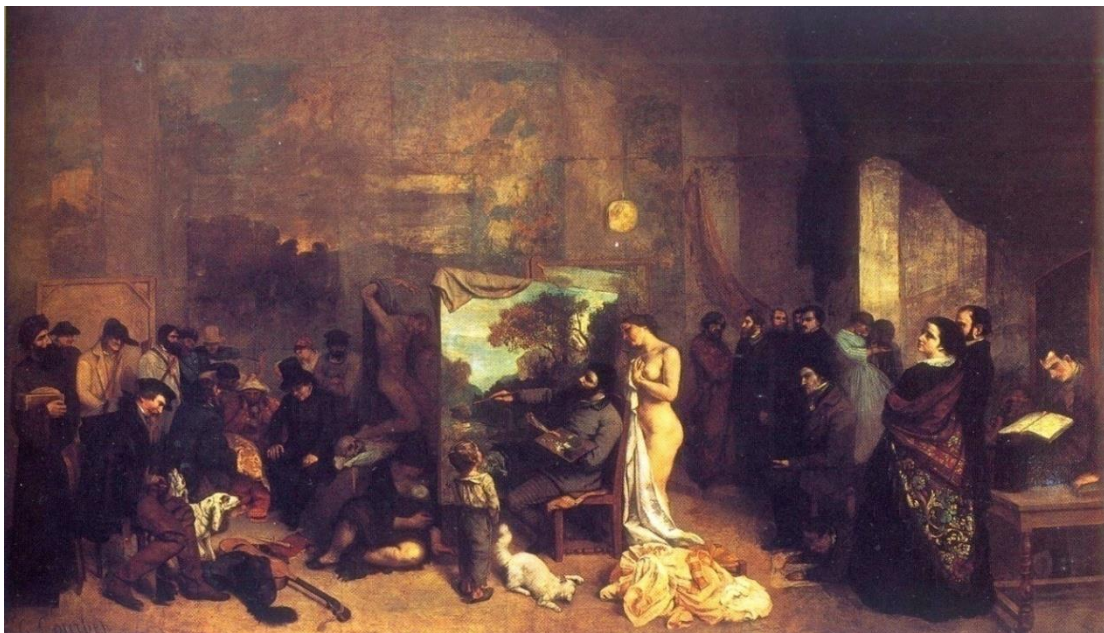


Figure 1, Gustave Courbet, *The Artist Studio*, oil on canvas, 1855, 11'9 ¾ x19'6 5/8, Musee d'Orsay Paris

Gustave Courbet demonstrated in a painting titled *the Artist studio* painted in 1855 that Academic training only served to spoil an artist's view. In the painting, there are two nude figures, one close to him, the artist (which represented him) and the other far off faded into the background of the studio; signifying the less important Academy culture to the artist's training or remoteness from reality. He preferred painting the world around him,

people who, at that time were not considered worthy of artistic treatment, like labourers, beggars, veterans, rather than painting the Madonna, or women nursing their babies. This was to demonstrate his sensibilities to the world around him. This shows his rejection of the rules of the Academy in his painting and thus signifying an era in the beginning of modernism in the visual arts (Marie and Hagen 2003).

Paul Cezanne is referred to as the father of modern painting because of his deeper reflection on painting and the properties of colours as a process in painting. In his time the painting consciousness began to contemplate time with planes and flatness pushing the boundaries of European art to what it is today, relocating the problems of painting back to the medium of paint and keeping a good distance from subject matter and themes that dominated the seventeenth and eighteenth century painting platform. The properties of paint and its technique became central to a new realisation. Modelling of figures in painting began to give way to more juxtaposing of colours on canvas to create feeling and emotion. Within this period Edouard Manet's (1832-1883) and Claude Monet's (1840-1926) ideas and thinking began to dominate the art scene especially in painting. The flatness and juxtaposition of colours on their paintings began to point at new thinking and new directions, which was flatness in rendering and quick succession of brush works on their canvas surfaces. These ideas characterised the rise of European modernism in painting.

How does one classify the beginning of Modernism in African culture? Should it not be during Africa's forceful encounter with the Europeans and the realisation there after? If Modernism means new perspectives and changes then it is the thinking of this paper that the encounter of Okonkwo and his kinsmen with the *iron horse* of the white men or perhaps, their realisation of a complete stranger taking over their lands and their gods being silent is the beginning of the new realisation. Could this fact re-create a complete story of Benin Kingdom during the incident that led to the death of Consul Philip and thereafter the white strangers invaded and overran the peaceful Kingdom, despite all the sacrifices the Kingdom had offered their gods? It is here, that I would submit that African Modernism started from.

Why did the white men progress in the evil forest and the church continue to dominate the land and the youth against the intention of their own shrines? Why did the Benin Kingdom fall despite all the efforts and sacrifices to the gods of the land, with some strange things happening to Africans; a new order beyond their previous understanding of culture, society and its perception or realisation of it?

This is the beginning of the new realisation in the narrative of Achebe in the fictional *Things Fall Apart*. This imagination is also echoed by Gabriel Okara in a poem: *piano and drum*; here piano represents the emerging strange culture while the drum is the existing culture and the hybrid impact on the poet and African as a whole and this new perspective that intends to dominate them. This idea in the imagination of Achebe over decades of struggling with the new culture crystallised into a hybrid form of visual narrative by the Zaria Art society led by Uche Okeke. This is a perspective of modernism in Africa. How does this impact the current discourse in painting?

Okeke-Agulu (2006) narrates the development of Modernism in the visual arts by the young students of the Nigerian art school in Zaria; perhaps this is the best platform to understand the development of the narrative of modernism in the visual arts in contemporary Nigerian society. Sometimes too, it could be challenging as there seems to have been two parallel narratives on the understanding of the true meaning of the modernist story and its emergence. The first perspective could be assumed this way.

According to Okeke-Agulu (2006) the early Zaria students like Okeke, Demas, Bruce and Grillo (who was a year their senior at the Art school) were responsible for the new culture of Modernism in Nigerian Art literature. His narrative account shows clearly the beginning of modernism on the Nigerian Art scene. Clearly he supports his claim with Uche

and Demas' hybrid of traditional art forms with the classical European styles which the students were taught at the College of Art, Science and Technology and were thus able to create a synthesis of the old and new. Particularly he claims that Uche's painting is a synthesis of perhaps what can be likened to Paul Gauguin's (1848-1903) symbolism and the traditional uli art form which was taught him by Uche's mother and Demas was influenced by Nok sculptural forms.

In yet another twist Kunle Filani asserted that Grillo started his artistic tutelage long before he enrolled at the Zaria College of Arts, science and technology 1956; this was inferred by Filani (2015):

Yusuf Grillo was brilliant and multi-talented. By the time Grillo enrolled for higher study in Fine Arts in Zaria in 1956, he was far more exposed to the undercurrents of creativity than most of his schoolmates. He had been taught by some of the pioneers of modern art such as Aina Onabolu, an itinerant art teacher to many secondary schools in Lagos. He also learned and benefitted from the artistic practices of Akinola Lasekan and J.K. Oye.

If these claims are true then it is Grillo's understanding of the elements of Art that Filani refers to here, which manifests in his rendering of his various drawings and paintings; which he must have acquired during his study with Paul Mount at the Yaba Technical College before coming to Zaria. The claim of superiority over his classmates is somewhat difficult to ascertain because most of his classmates died at the lalupon rail accident and only his friend Simon Okeke was left alive and later disappeared during the Nigerian Civil War. Simon was himself a strong draughtsman as evidenced from the few drawings, paintings and sculptures accredited to him. Filani's (2015) claim cannot be verified with scholarly evidence but what can be said is that Grillo was a good student of European classics to a large extent.

In yet another perspective, We like to think that perhaps, the introduction of modernism into Nigerian Art is not by the speculations of Uche Okeke's diary and the members of the Art society in Zaria or perhaps Murray and Onabolu of this world; rather it is clearly seen in Ben Enwonwu's *Anyanwu* or *the rising sun* or when he (Ben) (1917-1994) says *that I do not copy Giacometti because he copied my ancestors. I am a hybrid of my ancestors and the western culture where I was taught.*

We want to submit that is the beginning of modernism in Nigerian art. This thesis believes this ideology is a carryover of the influence of Leopold Sedar Senghor of Negritude which focuses on relationship between African worldview and modernity. From there things began to change especially when the Ulli Beier (1922-2011) had contact with the young undergraduates of the Zaria College of Art, Science and Technology which later became a University in 1961.

The claim of modernism and Modernity in the European and African context should be re-examined to furnish us with an understanding of its import in the practice of drawing and painting in contemporary African societies; since there are diverse accounts as to the genealogy of modernism and the modernity itself both in Europe and Africa. How can one define modernism in this context after understanding the European theory and the African forceful engagement with it?

This paper posits that the true meaning of modernism is a cultural awareness and the processes of new realisation within a given culture and its interpretation of sociological ideology. How do we contextualise this development? Okara's poem *Piano and the drums* seem to lead the thinking of this paper. In Okara's poem he says the sound of the drum takes him back to times when things were simple like *walking the brush path and the piano bring*

forth a complex culture he now dwells in the realisation of both cultures as a modern man and seem to be lost in the assimilations of both. This realisation seems to have challenged the thinking of the young Zaria students in the wake of the country's independence from the colonial masters to forge an indigenous art thrust and philosophy; this idea is embodied in the practice and theorisation of ingenious lines called *uli* into the modernist capitulation of the old into new.

This study intends to revisit the works of Paul Cezanne, Gani Odutokun and Ibrahim El Salahi and the images these artists have created to recapture the true meaning of modernism within European and African context. Each of these artists contributed to the understanding and development of the concept of Modernism in the contemporary European and African culture. The truth to examine here is whether there exists any boundary between European concepts of Modernism in painting and that of the African counterpart or perhaps, the two are the same story with different narrative patterns.

The objective of this paper is to recapture the essence of Modernism in painting, and re-theorise it within the new context of thinking; using one of the author's painting as an example. This is to see the progress of Modernism in painting. This paper is set to realise if the concept of Modernism can be found within the theory of Aniakor (2005) which says that Art has come to itself has named itself and has become itself.

### **Paul Cezanne (1839-1906)**

Paul Cezanne paid attention to the medium and technique more than the subject-matter in painting composition. His brush strokes are arranged in such a way that they obviously follow philosophical determinations that create effects of certain designs on the surface; these effects strengthen the feeling of natural harmony. He changes the direction of brush works without ever resorting to outline drawing; this could be seen in his 1885 painting *Mont Sainte-Victories*. This shows him as a careful contemplative artist on the process of pattern which these brush works dominate in his work, which might have rested in the upper half by emphasising the solid tangible forms of the rocks in the foreground. The treatment of flatness which characterises modernism is clearly seen in his paintings, especially the portrait of his wife. His approach to solving painting problems is a simple and clear-cut approach in painting using the flat rendering as a basic technique. This attributes perhaps from the impressionist approach to painting to could be seen in the works of Manet's portrait of Monet.

People often wonder what Cezanne's outlook in solving problems of painting is? Cezanne was a quiet man who would rather paint than listen to or engage in such theory of painting that according to him would lead us nowhere in solving the problems of art. I had commented elsewhere that Kolade Oshinowo often reminds me of Cezanne in many respects; one being his vigorous approach to painting and solving its problems rather than too much empty talk. Cezanne once said that one should talk less and paint more and listen to the rhythm of the brush work on canvas (Irokanulo, 2007).

If one compares Cezanne's painting with the seventeenth century Dutch artists, how awkward and perhaps clumsy would be his treatment of subject matter like still life compared to theirs. Cezanne's work would look awkward in comparison to the assured treatment of a similar subject the fruit-bow; his own painting is so clumsily rendered when compared to the Dutch masters; but Cezanne work does not really dwell on the aesthetics of the object but in the medium itself as a subject matter in that respect. While the Dutch masters excelled in the rendering of soft and feathery surfaces, Cezanne leaves us with a patchwork of colours with the napkin looking as though it is made out of tinfoil. His ideas in painting were fresh at that time, provoking new perspectives in thinking with the medium of paint.



Little wonder why Cezanne was considered the father of modernism in painting. He was fascinated with the effect of colour and modelling against the outright display of observatory skill exhibited by the Dutch artists. Cezanne continues with his deep meditation on the element of design as the better approach to painting and this gave rise to the concept of modernism in art.

However, the focus of modernism in Africa shifts a bit to accommodate a fusion of traditional African symbols into the Western concept of painting. The first to interest this writer is Ibrahim El Salahi.

**Ibrahim El Salahi (Born 1930)**



Figure 2, Ibrahim El Salahi, *Vision of the Tomb*, Gouache on paper, 1965

Ibrahim El Salahi's painting is in pursuit of a cultural identity. He clearly stands tall as a true modernist in every sense of the word. In September 2013 his paintings were shown at the Tate Modern art gallery, a platform where movements like Cubist, abstract expressionists, futurists and formalist artists have found expression and it is believed these artists were modernist in every sense of the word *modern*. Some critics, however, frowned and thought that Salahi's works were rather too vague to be ranked among these distinctive artists. Yet his paintings, according to Vagoe (2013), have portrayed him as a visionary artist of distinction with ever shifting vigorous and thoughtful philosophy in the body of his paintings. His practice is the current African definition of modernism within the complexity and fusion of Western modernity and Sudanese Arabic calligraphy as a platform of accessing Sudanese modernity. His works continue to narrate the complexity of Sudanese aesthetics using Arabic calligraphy as a tool of visual expression. His rate of production at this time became relentless; when viewing this period of his career, there is a sense of constant search

to find an artistic identity amongst the mainstream aesthetic influences to which he was exposed. Speaking of this era, the artist himself said "The years 1958-1961 were a period of feverish activity on my part in search of individual and cultural identities [...] Those years, as it turned out, were the years of transformation and transformation that I went through as far as my work was concerned."

Salahi's works feature the complexity of imagery which extends beyond the African continent and is characterised by the fusion of Islamic calligraphic writing and Sudanese traditional imagery and in that effort presenting a deconstructive imagery that represents the modernist language of visual arts. Ibrahim El Salahi was born in 1930 in Omdurman Sudan and he majored in Drawing and painting at the Khartoum School of Design (known as School of Design at Gordon Memorial College) from 1949-52 and was awarded a government Scholarship to study in the leading Art School in England. In 1952, the young modernist artist Ibrahim El Salahi went to University of London at the Slade College of Art, London.

Visiting the numerous museums and galleries that London has to offer, El Salahi saw first-hand many of the leading contemporary artists that were to influence his work. The paintings he produced at this time jumped through a number of styles, from impressionist portraiture to cubist landscapes. It is important to view this not as an act of derivation so much as a loosening-up of his own means of expression; an exploration of the parameters of his technique and visual style.

### **Gani Odutokun (1949-1995): His Painting and Philosophy**

Gani Odutokun is the leader of what could be referred to as the second phase of the Zaria Art School. He was a notable artist and theorist if compared to his peers that graduated from the Ahmadu Bello University between 1970 and 1980, a period of ten years. Since after his graduation in 1975, his drawings, paintings and submissions of his thinking were based on Kantian philosophy which dominated the creative quest of the school in the area of drawing, painting and mural designs. He seemed to capture the essence which Smith (in Irokanulo 2015) infers as concretising the abstract nature of philosophy into a body of visible material to dialogue with:

The poverty of philosophy remains a failure to act. And yet a philosophy of action seems the only hope remaining in the face of our present conditions of existence. Such a philosophy will materialise, I believe, when the philosopher has learned to engage body, mind, and spirit in the concrete representation of a philosophical abstraction. Who will this philosopher be, if not the artist-philosopher?

Gani focused on the expansion of knowledge in the medium of his art. There are perhaps two notable periods of Odutokun's painting explorations. The first period is where the broad brush strokes dominate his works. Here he explores human and symbolic forms as a pure expressive mode in rather naturalistic rendering. In this aspect he explores the medium *brush and colours* as fundamental in easel painting. Some of the paintings that are notable within this period are: *for the oppress, this man is not with us, the king sharing jokes with his generals and the king addressing his subjects*. These paintings and many others showcase Gani as a leading modernist in terms of dialoguing with his medium as an artist. He creates imagery with the sweeping flow of his brush with little regard for academic rules. Gani, like Courbet followed his instincts and painted from his thought and mind.



Figure 3, Gani Odutokun, *The King Addressing His Subjects*, Oil on Canvas, 88cm x 88cm, 1987

In the painting illustrated in Figure 3, Odutokun employed shadow to create empathy for the suffering people that are being oppressed. They are but shadows of themselves while the King and his soldiers live luxuriously at their expense. The shadows portray the people as if unable to resist the oppressive rule of their King. Shadow was employed here as a metaphorical element to show, perhaps, the suffering masses and their inability to control the situation around them. This is so because shadow is an element of existence that dwells on the strength of the object that casts it. Odutokun used this reality to visually communicate with his audience on the plight of the common people; and this is philosophy.

Shortly after this period, Odutokun (in Fuso 1984) philosophises his artistic trend thus: "Life's pattern is considerably influenced by the phenomena of accident and design. They turn out to be mutually complimentary: accident induction of design, accident destroying design and, design transforming a design to be destroyed later by accident and recreated, and so the process continues in an endless cycle." In this vein, his works took the concept of liquid oil colours which flows on the surface of his canvas capturing, according to him, the *restless spirit of our time*.

In the second period of his exploration he began to liquidise his paint into an aqueous form to express his understanding of restlessness of his people (Nigerians); though it is quite certain that Gani focused on the entire sociological activities of the whole world rather than Nigerians alone. This is evidenced in one of his paintings entitled *Anarchy and nationalities* this period continued until his death in 1995. In this period he left the easel as he claimed in Annabel (1999), *I suspect that the easel holds an artist bound from his creative essence*. Before then, he had been able to create a philosophy within the concept of his art. His imageries were derived from daily inspiration in his context, and his human forms are realised as a concept.

African artists in search of and developing visual language of modernism have shown a good thrust considering the effort of these artists; one can say safely that modernism is a new way of doing an old thing in that it gives it new life or new perspectives. This could be seen



from the structure of understanding the Western painting experience from the perspective of Paul Cezanne in the nineteenth century European Art experience. If we accept that modernism is reinventing the old into new perspective and confronting new ways like the *iron horse* in Achebe's story and the incomprehensible understanding of the Christian God to the natives of the land is of course modernity to their realisation or the wailing sound from distance lands by the words of Gabriel Okara.

### **One of the author's Personal dialogue with modernism**

We would introduce one of the author's personal understandings of modernism as perceived from my painting ideation. In my perspective of this understanding he started thinking with imagery derived from shadow. The idea of Paul Gauguin (explain Gauguin's idea) began to make sense to his practice as an artist and the same time as a scholar in painting history and theory, he decided to fuse my local understanding of what shadow meant to my cultural background.

He employed phenomenological methodology in realising his objectives, two interwoven and interdependent components from the realisation of aesthetics of imagery derived from shadow as a component of painting and development of theories. In this implication he tries to suggest that an artist is always a theorist that manifests his thinking through the use of colours, lines and space. In this regard the artist develops into something like *artist philosopher* much in the mould of Kandinsky, Mondrian and perhaps Odutokun himself.

His painting ideology conceptualised the imagery of shadow from my local understanding to create a new form of aesthetics in painting. *Onyinyo* is an Igbo word for an image or a shadow which construes likeness of an original source. It is a philosophy and mythology of the Igbo culture that explores the essence in everything like the expression of the Heideggerian theory of the "earth and the world". Earth is a proper noun while world is an abstract noun. The first deals with what the physical self can touch, while the latter deals with the abstract understanding of the physical. The Heideggerian theory in this context is an attempt to explain the earth which means the inexhaustible abundance of forms and shapes as we encounter and explore them. We explore and experience the properties of the physical universe, which is earth ever making meaning out of them. We are like a ship floating on the surface of a deep sea in an adventure to understand the earth. Yet it is exhaustible to our understanding. This is not different from *Onyinyo* which construes *mystery* as Miller in Irokanulo (2014) states *there are more enigmas in the shadow of a man who walks in the sun than in all the religions of the past, present and future.*

"Onyinyo" in Igbo mythology constructs the essence in all of us. As a child, the researcher often wondered about the mysteries of the *being* or the shadow in Igbo mythology. The researcher from childhood observed that the shadow was always in the company of other individuals according to the source of light, be it natural or manmade. It is natural just like the biblical saying 'I am always with you to the close of time.' The continuous appearance of "Onyinyo" or shadow has continued to fascinate the researcher to the present. The researcher began to explore the mystery of Igbo mythology in painting to capture its essence in virtual space. It agrees with the theory of Langer (in Irokanulo 2014) which states:

How can a work of art that does not represent anything—a building, a pot, a patterned textile be called an image?...it becomes an image when it presents itself purely to our vision...As sheer visual form instead of a locally and practically related object. If we perceived it as visual thing, we abstract its appearance from its material existence. What we see in this becomes simply a thing of vision—a form, an image. It detaches itself from its actual setting and acquires a different context.

Shadow or “Onyinyo” in European art history deals with function of light and its poetic play on objects and the environment. Shadows when applied to the philosophy of image in Langer’s text, seems to reveal the essence of the abstract ‘being’ called Onyinyo. A shadow can represent a source of unconcealment in the theory of the “being and time” as expressed in Heidegger’s theory. This theory also infers to revealing the hidden; much like in the mystery of freeing the figure in the statue of David by Michelangelo from the marble stone. The process reveals David and also creates the understanding of “being and time”. Time reveals a shadow which construes the essence in all things and being. Deconstructing the mystery of “Onyinyo” into an epistemological context demonstrates that ‘Onyinyo’ is another aspect of knowledge; that painting could make visible and reconstruct the virtual space which it inhabits. Painting becomes a platform in which this phenomenon could be read and understood as an epistemology.



Figure 5, Irokanulo Emmanuel, *Conference*, Oil on canvas, 135cm x 135cm, 2010

The main thesis is to re-think and perhaps if we have better understanding from our previous experience of modernism we can then begin to justify our various positions in modern painting and re-theorise it to capture its true essence. After a thorough understanding of the modernity in the Paul Cezanne and Paul Gauguin theorisation of modernism in drawing and painting this thesis’ realisation is that perhaps the Kantian theory invoked by Aniakor (2005) is the best way to hold onto the understanding of modernism in painting. Aniakor’s position that *Art has come to itself and has name itself and has become itself* is the focus of the thesis of this paper. This in itself is not far from the position of Kantian theory of *originality in the concept of fine arts*. The traditional painting we meant here is the realism and the illusionistic processes of painting by the old masters focused on the experience of the subject matter of the painting given to the audience and the properties of pigment were not regarded as part of the experience of art while modernists like Gani Odutokun the same properties of pigment becomes the focus of his art for example his liquidised paint constitute the experience of the painting without any pictorial implication; this is also seen in some of his apostles Jerry Buhari, Jacob Jari and Sani Mu’azu. In simple terms what Aniakor meant here, is that in modern terms art does not narrate but invokes itself through sound of plastic

brush strokes on the surface, which is the medium of the art is in itself sufficient to create illusion.

The confusion that most time engages us is the fact that there exists two interpretations of the narrative on modernism. The first narrative is the understanding of modernism as it came to being in the Western culture dealing with careful re-examination of old issues into new concept while the second is in the African ideology on modernism seems to be a rebirth of cultural understanding of the arts and sociological structure of living. Thus Okeke-Agulu (2006) insists that Uche Okeke is the originator of the African concept of modernism by fusing the teaching of his mother into the Western visual culture in that effect hybridizing a strong dynamic visual culture which we in saw in the Uli exploration which exists in host of graduates from University of Nigeria Nsukka. On another plane El Salahi contextualises Arabic calligraphic writing to personalise narratives in painting, bringing Sudanese culture and fusing the Arabic intelligence into critical perspectives in that visual culture. Gani on the other hand continued with the teaching and philosophy of Professor Agent, his teacher, fusing symbols from across the world into painting and calling attention to the medium itself and its processes. In this realisation Gani developed what perhaps critics would call the second phase of the *Zaria Art School*. Gani sustained the painting tempo in the Zaria Art School also at a point created a synthesis of Cezanne's thoughtful reflection on pushing and expanding boundaries of painting culture of the Zaria Art School today.

## Conclusion

Rethinking and theorising the concept of modernism in African perspective is the stand point of this paper. Since we have seen how African received modernism on their own platform, we can begin to recreate and try to dominate the idea and translate it into the re-wakening of our culture into a new body of thought that would re-direct our position and understanding. This writing started by acknowledging those facts that brought about modernism in the two separate cultures, and how those facts geared to the acceptability of art within its unfolding cultures after which the artists were able to detach themselves from the rigid academy rule their subject matter changed to every day issues around the artist. In later development Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Monet refocuses our attention back to the medium of art as the main subject matter in the act of painting; that is to say the process becomes the main focus of the act of painting. While in Africa, fusion of the traditional images into the sensibility of the acquired Western education forms the basis of the theory of Negritude propounded by Leopold Sedar Senghor. We also saw the emergence of Enwonwu, Okeke, El Salahi and Odutokun who introduced the *second phase of the Zaria Art School*. Already some of Nigerian artists like Jerry Buhari, Jacob Jari, Duke Asidere, Ben Osaghae and Gengba Offor are well positioned modernist painters within the concept of the Western culture like that of Paul Cézanne. They express deeper appreciation of the properties of the medium rather than subject matter. Exposing these works to the international platform would create a good persuasion for critics to recognise that African modernist artists could express this concept within these two platforms; either showing the strong understanding of the properties of the medium or bringing to bear old wine in a new skin. This thinking would benefit the critic of El Salahi's 2013 exhibition that his works deserve a space in the platform of *modernism in contemporary discourse*, and those who refer to contemporary African art as *post-colonial modernity* should have a rethink. Whichever way one looks at it, the dream of Leopold Sedar Senghor is fulfilling and refreshing the old idea of modernism forced on us by the colonial masters into new thinking of independence and understanding. The concept of modernism must be re-theorised to suit the particular nature and thinking of the African artists, to this end our cultural position of the *drum beat* must live up to the *concerto of the piano* and subdue it. The dreams of Ben Enwonwu, Yusuf Grillo, Uche Okeke and Gani

Odutokun must stand forth to bring new rhythm to the understanding of the African perspective of the new culture and ideology. We must refuse the Whiteman book *personification of the primitive of the lower Niger* in the Achebe's narrative of *Things falls apart*, to more acceptable comprehensive narrative of the African people.

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