

AN INVESTIGATION OF SELECTED CONCEPTUAL DRAWINGS OF LASISILAMIDI FROM 2010 TO 2015

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Abstract

This paper is an exposition of conceptual drawings of one the renown artists of 21st century modern Nigerian art. Drawing as an art deal with the representation of objects on a flat surface, it has continued through the ages and culture with lines and attached symbolic meanings to the artists. Lasisi Lamidi who is an academically trained artist, art instructor and resident practicing artist in Zaria, Kaduna State. Objectives were established, and related literature was reviewed. The method used by the Researcher in gathering data for this research is considered as an empirical. However, historical and descriptive methods were adopted. Drafted interview questions were also employed by the Researcher as to get firsthand information (primary source) for the study. Data analysis and discussion also contain in this research; this is through interpretive description from photographs of the art works. Finally, findings, conclusion, and recommendations which among them is to provide or create where interested members of the society, especially unemployed youths can learn this profession through the apprenticeship system.

Keywords: Drawing, conceptual, symbolic, experimental, flat surface.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Drawing is generally considered as an exercise that should be carried out at all times even outside the classroom. However, it is a way of training the eyes, promoting visual effects and muscular to co-ordinate with each other. The word drawing means the art of representing an object in line. It is the art of using lines to define the shapes of objects including man and animal. Similarly, Abednego (2019) says that it is the art of using lines to represent, define and describe objects visually. So, to draw well, one need to be able to observe well and interpret visually what one sees for perfect transmission.

Observation in drawing is very important and indispensable this is because one is expected to carefully and closely glance at an object. To an extent that one's mind feels its shape, form and size that are inherent in the work studied. There is a saying that 'practice makes perfection'; constant sketching increases the artist's skills. Similarly, Ibrahim

(2019) reported that, drawing is an invaluable method of improving one's understanding of things through observation.

Lamidi Lasisi is one of the Nigerian creative and dedicated modern artists known for his eclectic styles. This is to say that the rhythmic use of lines in his drawings, and the linear vein in his works are breakthrough, which proved his drawing to be unique of sculptures and paintings. Sani (2010) observed that experimentation is evident in his drawings, sculptures, paintings and designs. Angweh (2015), Sani (2020) and Lamidi (2022) said that, he was born on 4th September, 1966 in Bibiana, Ghana. He hails from Offa in Kwara State of Nigeria. Lasisi started his primary school in Kaduna state in 1973, and finished at Amina Primary School, Samaru - Zaria, Kaduna State in 1979. He obtained the West African School Certificate from Comprehensive High School, Ajasse - Ipo, Kwara State from 1980 to 1985. He later obtained the Bachelor of Art degree (B. A. Hons) in Fine Art from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria between 1986 and 1990 with specialisation in sculpture, and he completed the Postgraduate Degree (MFA) from 1994 to 1998. He also obtained the Doctorate Degree (PhD) between 2009 and 2015 from his Alma mata. Lasisi lectures sculpture in the same institution he graduated from. In another development, Agang (2012) stated that, Lasisi's rhythmic use of lines in his drawings, brush strokes and the linear vein in his works are breakthrough from the influence of Gani Odutokun his mentor who has guided his artistic development.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

From the literature available the Researchers are not aware of any research on conceptual drawings of Lasisi Lamidi. This creative Nigerian artist believes in experimentation with his eclectic styles, which is obvious in all his artworks. His experiments are investigations into human forms and characteristic through abstractions to interrogate the society using unique techniques as it appears in his drawings.

These techniques have not been studied, thus, the need to investigate and document them in a scholarly manner.

2.1 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to investigate and expose the conceptual drawings of Lasisi Lamidi, while the specific objectives include the following:

- i. to identify the conceptual drawings of Lasisi Lamidi from 2010 - 2015.
- ii. to investigate the styles, inspirations and contents of the works.
- iii. to study the aesthetic and meanings of Lasisi Lamidi's drawings from 2010 - 2015.
- iv. to elucidate the artistic contributions of the Lasisi Lamidi to modern art practice.

2.2 Justification of the Study

The study is justifiable for two reasons:

- (1). there are dynamic and creative artists who have made names in the corridor of Nigerian art scene in several ways, but some of them have not received adequate art history scholarship documentation of their works. Lamidi Lasisi who is the focus of this study is not an exception.
- (2). He has produced volumes of drawings in different techniques and medium, which are not been studied adequately thus, created room for this study.

2.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for bringing to limelight the conceptual drawings of Lasisi, as it relates to form and content. Again, his conceptual drawings are used as composition for production of his metal sculptures. Significantly, the research has pointed out the artist's contributions to the modern Nigerian art scene.

2.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of this research, which include; Angere (stilt dance) series, African Women series, African masks series and Northern city series. Due to the large volumes of the drawings created, this study is delimited to only two (2) work each from the aforementioned series making eight (8) works in all, which address the socio-culture, political, and economic situation of the country.

2.5 Review of Related Literature

This research review relevant and related literature from articles, books, papers, catalogues and internet sources, which have bearing on drawing, followed by specific literature on the artist (Lasisi Lamidi). The view of different writers and art historians like Sani (2010), Yusuf (2011), Agang (2012), Adeyemo and Duniya (2016), Jari, et al. (2016), and a host of others have written on Lasisi and his artworks including his sources of inspiration, artistic style and creative skills were all reviewed and duly acknowledged.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The appropriate conceptual framework for this research, is the eclectic approach of investigation, as propounded by Egonwa in Sani (2010) was adopted looking at the background of the artist as it affects his artistic development. The approach was used to analyse the overall structures of the concept; techniques, compositions, themes, and contents as it deals with his conceptual drawings. Conceptual framework, according to Vaughan in Onoja (2017) is "a written or visual presentation that explains either graphically, in narrative form, the main things to be studied the key factors, concepts or variables and the presumed relationship among them". In a related study, Jari in Samuel (2015) notes that, "in recent time, several specialists published textbooks that, deals with the topic of visual research and related approaches to make inquiry". Based on this, eclectic was used to trace the historical background of the artists (Lasisi Lamidi) as it

affects his conceptual drawings.

2.7 Research Design and Methodology

Research Design and Methodology, according to Jacob, Paul, and Bolaji (2014) is the plan of logical structures or arrangement of condition for the effective collection and analysis of data. It is the plan of method to be used in approaching a research problem. To achieve such therefore, the Researchers adopt a procedure that would assist and lead to a fruitful result of this research, using the descriptive and historical research design.

2.8 Research procedure: The purpose of collecting data for this study, the researchers used the descriptive and observational methods. These research methods are concerned with the collection of art works for the purpose of describing and interpreting the existing style, forms and contents on the topic under study. Yusuf (2011) and Sani (2021) used these methods in their individual research and achieved desired results.

Source of data: It was divided into two sub topics; Primary source, the primary sources of data include the first-hand information collected from the artist in an interview form. Secondary source, the secondary source of information is consulting literary sources or written documents such as textbooks, thesis, seminar papers, exhibition catalogue, journals, and websites.

Research instruments: the instruments for data collection includes; oral interview schedule and questionnaire.

2.9 Research population and sample

The population of this research is basically focused on conceptual drawings of Lasisi Lamidi. Among the series of drawings produced by the artist; four (4) types were identified and selected. In this study, two (2) works each was sampled from the population of twenty (20) different types of works. In doing so, a total eight (8) works were selected for effective analysis for this research work, covering the following headings: Stilt Dance Series, African Masks Series, African Women Series, and Northern City Series.

Method of data analysis: Data collected was presented and analyzed using descriptive and interpretative methods. According to Adetoro in Muhammad (2015) descriptive procedure can be used to gain more insight into an existing event, practices and so on and so forth. On the other hand, the interpretative approach of data analysis is employed to study the processes involved in the production of artworks; the materials, equipment as well as the stages of development of the works. The investigators adopt these procedures because of their appropriateness for an in-depth discussion and analytical study of Lasisi Lamidi's conceptual drawings.

3.0 Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion:

Information collected were articulated and presented by way of discussion on the plates and interpretation of his conceptual drawings. The analyses are done under the following sub-headings. Two works each are chosen and discussed:

1. Stilt Dance Series.
2. African Masks Series.
3. African Women Series.
4. Northern City Series.

Stilt Dance Series



**Plate I: Stilt Dance Series, Pen on Paper, 21cm X 30cm, 2010.
Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani Muhammad Babangida.**

Plate I, the artist successfully established the concepts of Yoruba stilt dancers through the simple interpretation of forms. The composition is represented in a caricature form. The figure was done in 2010 using pen on paper. It is measured 21cm X 30cm. It is rendered in semi-abstract; it stands symmetrically on elongated feet with the right trouser folded up. The waist relies more on the right hip with the movement of the chest, stretched slightly forward.

The figure stands on bowlegs with its body slightly bent to the right-hand side in a movement of dancing. The cylindrical head is represented with two circles which suggest the eyeballs and an elongated antenna with an indication of geometric shapes representing the accessories worn by the stilt dancers during performances. The three right hand fingers are clearly fixed on a stretched palm with an indication of hand bangles while the

left fingers that are slightly stretched sideways are represented with a zigzag line showing three fingers in a repeated manner.

The common features of the work are the geometrical shapes breaking into segments as they inter-lock one another. The artist used that method for better understanding of the composition. A close observation reveals the joy, happiness and excitement of Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria and the love they have for dancing during ceremonies. The artist reflects his passion for dancing in the composition through rhythmic movement of the costume with strokes of lines and effectively used of light and shades.

The reflection of feminist figures being portrait in the Stilt Dance Series of the artist is perhaps the twisted nature or the interesting nature of their anatomies move the artist to represent them in his works. Secondly, the flexibility of female cursive lines makes it more interesting for the lines to flow into each other easily and again, make it more interesting for the onlookers to simply appreciate the works. Similarly, it goes in line with the execution of metal sculptures (researcher's opinion).

Stilt Dance Series in actual sense as explain by Lamidi (2021), that he was moved and motivated by the "Owambe" of Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria. Owambe literally means celebration, it could marriage ceremony, naming ceremony, or any festival. In an interview, the artist added that the dancing steps, the colourful attires displayed by the "Ashabi" (uniform) worn by the celebrants and relations fascinate me, with compliment of moving in lines. The gearhead of the women complimenting with "Booba", caps of the men goes with the modern "Abada". It is a kind of Yoruba gown made in small size. He concluded that women are more in the forefront of any types of celebrations. So, the idea of female figurines spring into my mind and I decided to use it as my subject matter in most of my drawings or any form of my artworks.



**Plate II Stilt Dance Series, Pen on Paper, 21 X 30cm, 2011.
Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani, Muhammad Babangida.**

The above figures appear to be the same, but a close observation on it reveals some certain features, such as the head of the figure on the right which is a round shape different from how it stood for in plate I, similarly, the figure is depicted in a shadow form with the use of vertical, horizontal and zigzag lines without details compare to the one by the left which takes the same format with plate I. The head of the right figure is thrown sideways stretching the left hand on the shoulder of the left figure. A close observation on the figures indicates couple dancing on a stage with all manner of lovely display. The right figure seems to be the wife represented with cylindrical head slightly bent to the right where the husband is with a lovely and smiling face trying to rest her right hand on the waist of the husband. It is done with pen on paper, measuring 21 X 30cm, and produced 2011. The drawing can be found in the artists' collections.

The artist was able to portray the kind of exciting mood couples create during their marriage ceremony of jubilating for a successful wedding. This type of excitement is typical in every African traditional wedding. The figures are symmetrically balanced with the use of black pen in lighter and darker tones. The figure by the right seems taller than the one by the left which suggest that, in any African traditional family, the husband is said to be the head while the wife, a supporter and trainer of the entire family.

African Women Series

In African setting women are seem to the pillars of the home front, where first school started as amother. She inculcates and decide on what one will be to fit into the society, except in few casesthat one goes into the society to become something else. An African woman is a shaper and molder of characters of entire human beings. She teaches the first language to be understood byall. These and any more are perhaps, what motivated the artist to the choice of creating “AfricanWomen Series”.

In this work the artist did not use too many colours as he does in other works, he used just threecolours that are complimenting each other. The following colours were used the red, black andyellow. The artist used red colour to depict some virthal areas of the figure, example is the fashionable ear ring, bangus, and part of the attire from upper side down to the figure's skit. Blackis the dominance colour which represent the entire body of the figure. It shows the strength of thefemale figure and as we know that black is beauty, it shows the beauty of the figure. The figure inplate III: whose parts of the body are depicted using different shades of lines like; vertical, horizontal, curve, spackling and zigzag represents a female figure. The work is rendered in movement as in surrealism. It is done using pastel, charcoal, and pen on paper. It measures 52cmX 64cm. In this picture frame, a female figure seems like Fulani woman from the Northern part ofNigeria in a dancing posture.



Plate III: African Women Series, Mixed Media, 52cm X 64cm, 2011. Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani Muhammad Babangida.

This is evident in the way the figure confidently stares down as well as the movement of

the hands and other parts of the body. The figure is rendered with a traditional Fulani type of hairstyles depicted with red, black, and little yellow colour. The hands which stretched side waist are rendered with bangles, three on the right and two on the left with orange and blue colour. On the gown which runs down to the knees are touches of red, orange, blue, green, black which suggests the love of Fulani for multi- colours.

The feet of the figure is slightly cut off. The red and little touch of green used on the figure's gown are symbolic and harmonious with the splashes of dotted red and green sprinkled all over the traditional hausa turban. The background of the figure is light with free flow of pastel colour strokes, which makes the whole work look faded.



**Plate IV: African Women Series, Mixed Media, 52 X 64cm, 2012,
Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani, Muhammad Babangida.**

Plate IV is the study of a female figure depicting the traditional Africa woman. It is made up of charcoal, pen, pastel, pasted pieces of newspaper and card board as the supporting base (mixed media). It is measured 52 X 64cm, executed 2012, still in the artist's collections. The head of the figure is slightly cut off with an elongated neck and one ball of eye. The hands are stretched sideways with four fingers each which makes the figure conceptual. The black thick line by the left side of the eye suggests pleated hairs. On the transparent garment is a touch of red, green, orange, purple colour in a harmonized manner. The background painted with purple signifies royalty which suggests the figure to be from a royal family.

The transparent gown flows down below the knees of the figure with multiple colours

which indicate how affluent and colorful Yoruba traditional attires are. The figure stands with open arms and legs to take control.

The artist was inspired by traditional African women who dress gorgeously to public functions using their traditional attires, displaying their culture and identity. The strength of Lasisi's works especially his drawing series lies in their free experimental nature and this is evidenced on this piece of work.

African Masks Series



Plate V: African Masks Series, Mixed Media, 32cm X 52cm, 2013. Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani Muhammad Babangida.

Plate V: is rendered in pastel, charcoal and pen on paper. The size is 32cm X 52cm, it was executed in 2013. The drawing is a composition of African masks in semi abstracted form. The theme of this series "African mask" was inspired by the lines which run across the composition severally in bringing out the African geometric and symbolic shapes as well as the intricate and delicate Africa motifs on the figure.

In this composition, one can notice the eyes which is widely open with a horizontal line that runs across the eyes dividing it into two equal parts. It can be said to be a mask for ritual performance because of the destructive face as well as the artificial eyeballs. Interwoven lines run across the forehead of the figure like a spider's web. Only the eyes seem to be more visible on the mask; the stylized rendition of the upper part of the eyelash with several outlines flowing vertically, horizontally and interwoven, makes it look more real as well as possess the true picture of African cultural identity. The interlocking and flow of the different harmonious colours makes the craftsmanship of the work appealing.

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The artist's choice of blue as the dominant colour symbolizes loyalty, wisdom, intelligence and faith and this could be a suggestion to Nigerians that, even with the multiple issues and challenges facing the country, Nigeria can still be one if wisdom is applied in tackling the issues. The artist also placed some patches of colours side by side to indicate harmony. The following colours are red, purple, black, green, orange and white in their different grades, hues, and tonal values were used by the artist as supplementary colours. Nigeria is a complex nation that has over fifty (50) ethnic groups with different ideologies and beliefs.

This alone makes it difficult to understand the spectrums of people, perhaps, landed us to where we are today. With all kinds of atrocities: Kidnapping, Boko-Haram, Rituals, Yahoo-Yahoo, etc. just for materialism. The artist used those to tell us to blend together and do the needful for prosperity will definitely judge each and every one of us.



**Plate VI African Masks Series, Mixed Media, 32 X 52cm, 2014.
Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani, M. Babangida.**

The work in plate VI was done in 2014 with pastel, charcoal and pen on paper. This piece of artwork measure 32 X 52cm. it is still in the collections of the artist. Blue, purple, green, black, yellow and orange colour was used by the artist in rendering the work. Green which is the dominant colour suggests the figure as having a relationship with agriculture. Other colours were carefully and harmoniously used in highlighting the design. The smoothing and splashing method used in applying the black and purple colour creates an interesting movement on the work. The free flow of blue and yellow makes the figure more appealing. The artist used circle, half circle, triangle and rectangle interlockingly in the work to achieve a desired African motif. The figure has a right eye as the only sense organ that is clearly defined. It is a semi abstract artwork depicting African mask.

A close observation of the work and the previous ones discussed shows the “eclectic” nature of the artist, considering the diverse and innovative approaches in his art work which cut across his paintings, sculptures and drawings.

Northern City Series



**Plate VII: Northern City Series I, Mixed Media, 52cm X 64cm, 2015,
Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani Muhammad Babangida.**

Plate VII is one of the semi abstract works of Lasisi, the work titled “northern city” was achieved through the simplicity of Hausa traditional architecture. An attempt is made to capture a scene of a city entrance in day light when the sun is yet to set. The work was produced in 2015, measuring 52cm X 64cm and made of charcoal, pen and pastel on paper. The painting portrays a big city with a wide entrance, and the type of buildings found in the northern part of Nigeria. It is characterized by varying degree of vertical, horizontal, cursive and crisscross lines.

However, the pastel strokes and the techniques employed showed the influence of Gani Odutonku on the artist. The slim elongation of the buildings, figure and horses have a significant influence from one of Philip Gushem's works titled “Emir Procession”. The sky of the composition is rendered in a smoky form with the help of sky-blue and a touch of yellow which suggests the ray of the half sun from the left. It is enhanced with outline of black round the sun. earth colour, purple, green, blue, yellow and orange used on the structure and the intricate patterns and symbolic designs on the architecture, while black is used to enhance the structure, design, human figures and the horses and its riders. A close observation of the work reveals the Emir and his entourage returning from a journey, this is in accordance with the unique habits of the people who liked working together as one family or in one faith.



**Plate VIII: Northern City Series II, Mixed Media, 52 X 64cm, 2015.
Artist's Collection, Photograph by Sani, Muhammad Babangida**

A close observation of the work reveals the Emir and his entourage returning from a journey, this is in accordance with the unique habits of the people who liked working together as one family in one faith. The painting in plate VIII is a semi abstract work painted on a flat surface, it showcased the northern architecture from a linear view with a large number of people heading toward the traditional architectural building (mostly found in Kano and Zaria). Their focus on the building perhaps, suggests that they are going for a traditional or religious function. However, the artist painted a large sunset above these buildings, this sunset could have religious symbolism especially to the Muslims, as it might be one of the reasons these people were heading towards the molded house locally referred to as "Gida Kassa".

Nevertheless, the artist exhibited the cultural strength of the northern people, not only by their architecture but also by their use of colour. The most dominant colour on these buildings is purple which signifies royalty; appraising the royal strength of the northern culture and religion. However, the supplementary colours earth-colour, yellow ochre, red, brown and orange, perhaps suggests the beauty of the northern people and their persistence on cultural practices. The large sunlight could also signify, their obedience to the supreme God, and their dedication to both religion and culture; going to pray from time to time to please the supreme God and working in love and one accord among themselves. This could be one of the reasons why they work in group to pray, and return in fellowship.

4.0 Conclusion

An investigation of conceptual drawings of Lasisi Lamidi has revealed that the artist's major source of inspiration and motivation is from his Late Uncle Gani Odutokun; this has manifested in his pastel, pen and charcoal strokes and the techniques employed in his

drawings and other works of the artist. His stilt dance series are characterized by traditional Yoruba dance, his African Women Series are to him, a way of depicting his love for the gorgeous dresses of traditional African women to occasions.

Lasisi's passion and appreciation for African masks go beyond the African masquerade, which is annual festival with lots of ray of colours and patches of assorted fabrics put together in form of collage. This masquerade goes round and dance to the rhythm provided by his followers, also influenced his "African Masks Series" and in his "Northern City Series", the research found out that the artist long stays the north might have inspired him to embark on the study of Northern City Series two-dimensional form. Motivation might be derived from ancient Samaru – Zaria, Kaduna State and parts of Kano State Emirs palaces.

5.0 Recommendations

This research has established the following recommendations:

- There are other series of Lasisi's conceptual experimental drawings that are not studied; examples are his masquerade series, couple dance series and lots more. It is therefore necessary that further studies be embarked on Lasisi's drawings.
- In view of this survey, it is also recommended that artist like Lasisi Lamidi should be encouraged by government agencies by commissioning him to execute works that will serve documentary purposes in the society.
- From the findings of this research, it is recommended that, an avenue should be provided or created where interested members of the society, especially unemployed youth can learn this profession under the artist through apprenticeship so that, at the end of their training, they can sustain themselves and their families. Thus, this will go a long way in reducing over dependence on white collar jobs and even unemployment in the society.

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