



Research Paper

Nigeria slowed down: Political Sculpture Statement in Waste Metals

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ABSTRACT

Art is a powerful tool in politics especially as it gets into the hands of an activist. The various genres of Art are all capable of activating political sensibilities and consciousness in the society. It is in this light that "Nigeria Slowed Down" a political waste metal sculpture by Antonia Okogwu tends to lend its voice on the political situation in Nigeria since 2015. One tend to ask at this juncture what is the political situation in Nigeria that has generated this piece of metal statement and why 2015 and why Nigeria. These are the hypothetical questions addressed in this essay that has engaged the ideologies of representation that deals with issues of image and politics brought forward by Sezgin Boynik, as the theoretic frame. This ably suit this study as it is difficult to see theories that combine the two disciplines even though the two are entwined. Qualitative mode of enquiry is employed and due to its studio based nature some methods of assemblages welding and construction were brought in. Sensitivity to the governance of where one is also the key to survival instincts of man and art and activism are entwined.

KEY WORDS: Political, Sculpture, Activism, Arts, Waste Metals

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I. INTRODUCTION

Often times Sculpture reflects the image of the society and on the other hand the politics of a place or state reflects also the image of the society. Errouane (2017) also confirmed that Art and politics are entwined in complex ways. However not all sculptures are politically inclined even though most sculptures reflect images of the society or environment within. Nigeria Slowed down is purely a political statement that reflected the situation in Nigerian from 2015.

The sculptor by his aesthetic idiosyncrasy and the virtue of fact that he mimics God psychologically tends to be highly spiritual therefore can operate in the prophetic realm. Often times the sculptor engages his work to pass on a message to the society. This is the case of this Sculpture that engaged the situation in Nigeria as President Muhamadu Buhari took over the governance of Nigeria in 2015. Activities slowed down and it portrayed a governance that had no prior agenda except to just rustle out power from the other opposition party. Therefore Nigeria Slowed down is a visual sculpture political imagery of 'Sidon look' situation that persisted right from his inception to this present time. This imagery is portrayed with waste metals from bicycle, fan and other metals found in Aluu waste dump site in University of Port Harcourt community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CITED WORKS

It not very common to find a theory that combines politics and art one can comfortably hinge on the ideologies of representation that deals with issues of image and politics brought forward by Sezgin Boynik in his 'Towards a Theory of Politics and Art' (2015)

The different genre of arts are powerful tools in political statements be it sculpture, painting, textiles, graphics, performance, cartoons plays, music and novels. The political artists handle any of these areas of art in the arena of politics excels. One goes down memory lane to the songs of Miriam Makeba of South Africa, Fela Anikpolapo Ransom Kuti, the reggae songs of Majek Fashek, Bob Marley and the wailers. These music artists

evoked freedom through their music. They fought for the emancipation of Africa with their music. George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' is a political satire of moves to change inequality (Sutherland, 2016), 'Blood on the Niger' by Emma Okocha the first black on black genocide book that exposed the killings during the Nigerian civil war in Asaba.

'Nigeria Slowed down' is another political metal sculpture that has added its voice to the current situation in Nigeria. In fact the metaphorical radial rickety movement keeps moving round and round a particular sport amounts to no movement.

It is very common to associate art with politics especially in this era where Trump's sculpture was used to demine him. Seeing how Donald Trump inched his way toward the Republican Party nomination, the American Activist Collective 'Indecline' joined forces with Cleveland-based artist and sculptor Joshua Monroe nick named "Ginger" to create five life-size nude statues of Donald Trump, including one that was installed in Union Square in Manhattan on August 18, 2016. The Statues represented a mockery of the candidate's vow for presidency. The five statues were transported to high-traffic locations in five major United States of America cities: New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Cleveland, and Seattle) on the same day, at the same time.

During the pandemic as Suwito (2020) posited that campaigns retreated into the use of artistic posters in the social media because of social distancing citing examples with # Climatestrike movement and even advocated that universities should teach Art Activism. Demirel and Altintas (2012) are concerned with the relationship between Art and Politics and concluded that both artists and politicians should rule. Errouane (2017) also confirmed that Art and politics are entwined in complex ways. Performance is another art that successfully engages society impact fully. Lars Jans (2020) Holoscenes performed in Abu Dhabi political poignant reminder of climate change as can be seen in Figure. Similarly, Sarah Sandman (2020) engaged textile fashions worn with design of bricks in protest against misogynistic language by Trump in his election campaign, 2020. El Seed, a Muslim graphics translated into Arabic quoting John Locke a great English philosopher - 'It is one thing to show a man that he is in error another to put him in possession of the truth'. : Richard Move as Martha Graham, in NYC dance stuff creatively portrays perhaps a person bursting loose from the status quo (Kourlas, 2011)

Coming nearer home to Africa protests became more crude and so pungent in driving in their messages as could be seen in Boniface Mwangi() performance in importing pigs to Nairobi close to the palimentary complex. He and his associates in protest to the law makers demanding for increase in wages to their already too high wages at the expense of the masses. These pigs were given blood to feed on significant of the insatiable greed of most African politicians.

Asukwo the seasoned political cartoonist ably portrays the race to the director general in World trade organization of which Okonjo Iweala was worn the election but was denied the seat by Donald Trump, the president of the United States of America. This is connected with the slowed nature of Nigeria that is encumbered by corrupt practices. One incident of a governor, Okorochoa of Imo state in Nigeria that is worth mentioning here is the Sculpture garden that notable personalities in Africa were sculpted such as Jacob Zuma, the former president of South Africa and a lot more. So many controversies trailed this project that music insinuatve slang in Igbo language 'Akpola gi?' Meaning have you been sculpted?, cropped up.



Figure 1: The emperor has no balls, Joshua Monroe (Indecline), Resin cast, plaster base, 199.4cm. 2016, Courtesy: www.widewalls.ch



Figure 2: Lars Jan, *Holoscenes b* performed by Annie, Abu Dhabi, political poignant reminder of climate change, 2020, Courtesy: [nyuad.nyu.edu>events>may>hol...](https://nyuad.nyu.edu/events/may/hol...)



Figure 3: Sarah Sandman, *Bricks x Bricks*, Protest against misogynistic language by Trump in his election campaign, 2020, Courtesy: Brick x Brick



Figure 4 : El Seed, Mural , quoting John Locke translated into Arabic , ‘It is one thing to show a man that he is in error another to put him in possession of the truth’ photograph: Michael Brydon, Courtesy: blog.ted.com.



Figure 5: Richard Move as Martha Graham, Nyc dance stuff, Photograph: Josef Astor. Courtesy: estuff.files.wordpress.com



Figure 6 : Boniface Mwangi , Artistic Protest Performance with Pigs and Law makers Names written on the pigs, in expressing anger against the demand wage increase by the law makers. Kenya, 2013, Courtesy: www.bbc.com



Figure 7: Ballot Snatcher, Gabriel Woko , Sculpture, Fibre glass ,5ft.6ins.x 1ft.14ins.x4ft. Garden Dept. of Fine Arts and Design University of Port Harcourt.



Figure 8: Cross Section of Statues at the Hero Square in Owerri, Courtesy: Premium Times

III. METHODOLOGY

The general design of this study is qualitative and also utilized the studio methods of Assemblages, welding and construction and the materials used in this composition are waste metals of old fans bicycles and rods finished with white and green and silver spray paints.

Waste Metals as Components of Composition

Nigeria Slowed Down

Step 1. Conceptual Stage

Nigeria Slowed Down is a thought that bemused my mind during and after the 2015 Nigerian election and things naturally were very slow in the country. This thought took off with the way Nigeria was running and suddenly slowed down as if she were on a journey in the plane and then nose-dived and switched to a rickety bicycle.

Step 2. Acquisition stage

Metal waste of standing fan blade casing, wires, bicycle wheel and handle, $\frac{3}{4}$ rod and found joined angular square pipe.

Figure 8: Bicycle Wheel

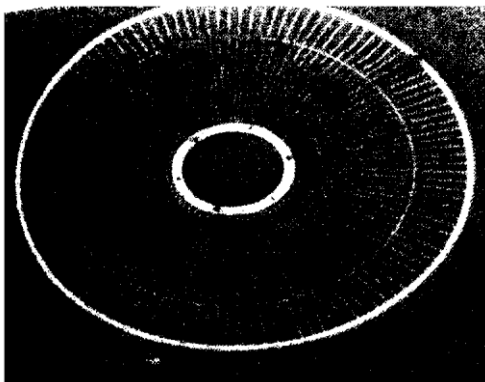


Figure 9: Part of Fan protective Cover

Figure 9: Standing Fan Cover

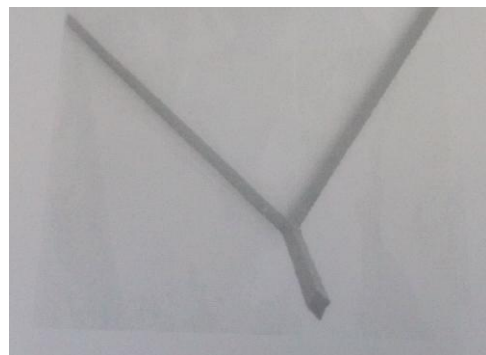


Figure 10: Y shaped square hollow pipes as base



Figure 11: $\frac{1}{4}$ in Rod



Figure 12: Components of *Nigerian Slowed Down...* Photograph: Okogwu Antonia

Step 3. Construction Stage

Welding is done on the $\frac{3}{4}$ ins. rod on the square pipe that serves as a base of the assemblage. The two circular discs from the standing fan are latched together on the bicycle wheel and hung on to the composition through the 1ft long $\frac{1}{2}$ long $\frac{3}{4}$ ins rod, the bicycle handle was then forged into the $\frac{3}{4}$ ins rod and the dangling break rods were forced into spaces in the fan disc to aid mobility.



Figure 13: Metal Base



Figure 14: Wheel attached with Fan Cover



Figure 15: Construction

Step 4, Finishing Stage

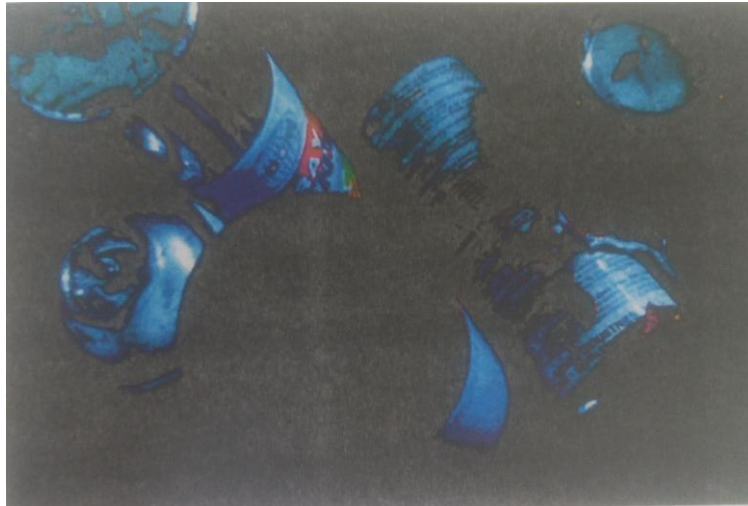


Figure 16 : Spray paint Cans

At this stage, after the construction and assembling, the work was ready for de-rusting because the components were wastes from the dump-sites and as such, were predisposed to being exposed to variances of the weather. The de-rusting was done with metal brush and iron sponge after which the composition was sprayed with oil based paints of silver for the handle, white and green.

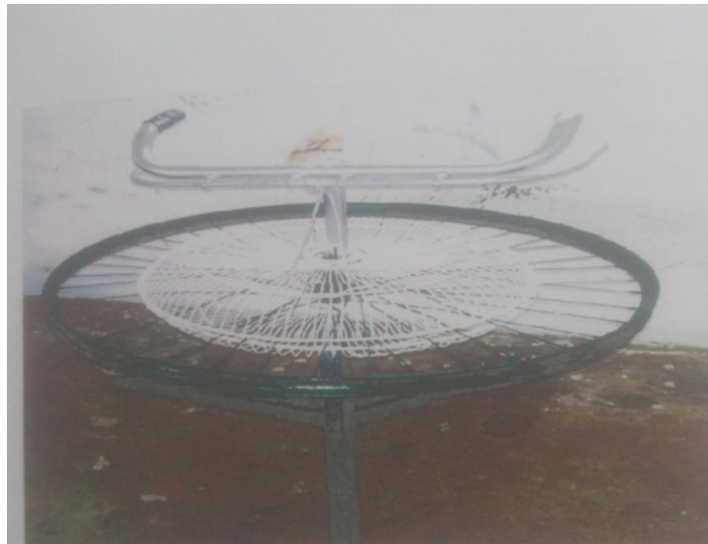


Figure17 : Nigerian slowed down, Discarded metal bicycle wheel and handle, fan casing and square pipes, 68.58cm x 81.28cm (2ft.3ins x 2ft.8ins) 2014, Photograph: Okogwu Antonia, 2016

This Sculpture is a configuration of metals of various gauges of rods and pipes. It is divided into three parts, the upper part which is the bicycle handle, the tension packed middle of the circular wheel and fan blade casing and the square pipe base. All these three parts can be dismantled for was movement and package.

This particular work is a product of time and chance in thinking about Nigeria and the broom change of the All Progressive Alliance (A.P.C) government.it involves metaphor in forms. The wheel of the bicycle symbolizing movement supported by standing fan blade casing also suggesting movement but the bicycle handle is the driving force. However, a second look at this handle, weak, worn out and mishandled suggested weakness and what force can be mustered by such bicycle. This same weakness is also exhibited in the short $\frac{3}{4}$ rods inserted in the still weaker metals of lower gauge that characterizes the fan blade casing that us coated with white in line with the white colour of the Nigerian flag. This white colour symbolizes purity despite the heavy corruption that is ravaging Nigeria. The same casing is attached to the bicycle wheel in the upper and the lower side, thereby bestriding the wheel in support.

The fan casing is circular and the wheel is also a circular form and both forms are spiky, this would have monotonous but for the variation in size and also colour. The spokes of the bicycle wheel and the converging lines of the tiny rods of the fan casing are centrifugal, leading the eyes to the centre rod of the handle. The gauge of metal and the colour green encases the work and arrests the radiating spikes of both the wheel and the fan blade casing delimiting the spaces within and outside the Sculpture. The chance element came into play with the square pipe that was found just the way it is from the dump-site serving as a stand or pedestal for the bicycle handle, the wheel and the fan casing, it aptly compliments by contrasting in its square nature with the circular after in the middle region of the form.

Movement

The Sculpture falls into the category of stables since it utilizes motion and not static. The motion is vertically radial with a simple mechanism of welding on a $\frac{3}{4}$ ins. (1.905cm) rod to the square pipe base and then with the inserting of a wider pipe of the bicycle handles into it. Then it was latched onto the two break rods of the bicycle handle unto the spaces of the fan casing which when turned automatically harnesses the ball bearing in the bicycle wheel to generate motion.

IV. DISCUSSION

“Nigeria Slowed Down” has brought to fore many arts associated with politics both in Nigeria and other climes. The emperor has no balls provoked some political activism trying to cast aspersions on President of United States of America, Donald Trump. First he is not an emperor and one wonders how they got to know that he has no balls or was it a metaphorical statement. Trump was also not spared by Sarah Sandman fashion Bricks x Bricks, Protest against misogynistic Trumps language. One thing is very clear and that America is really practicing freedom of speech this cannot be said in Nigeria. You try such stunt in Nigeria with all the shout of freedom of speech you will be arrested or even killed. Asukwo the political cartoonist must have shared how he ran into problems because of his cartoons with Nigerian government (Musa, 2020) Okorochas’ Heroes garden in Imo State of Nigeria was as full of controversy perhaps because of the perceived use as avenue for corrupt practices though it is a commendable venture.

‘Nigeria Slow down’ is one of the many ways to express the situation in Nigeria .It is even worse than when it was produced in 2015 .It is not just slowed down but halted and is going backwards now all because of greed by our political class, Nigeria needs re-orientation and a new mindset engineering to come out of this economic depression we are heading into

V. CONCLUSION

Virtually every field of study is centred on Man therefore most fields are related by this singular fact. Sculpture studies is centred on mans’ anatomy and even more therefore its relativity to Politics is not farfetched .It takes a politically sensitive minded person to decode the problems of a State. Arts of various genre as Sculpture, Textiles, plays, performances, novels and music can be deployed in active ‘artivism’ .In other words not all artists or art works can be categorized as political ‘.Nigeria Slowed Down’ has aptly portrayed the political ‘Sidon’ look situation in the country with the use of waste metals and the radial movement introduced to the Stabile metaphorically inundates the retrogression in Nigeria. There is a yearning for a new Nigeria and for this to emerge there must be reorientation and strengthening of the various institutions.

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