
Travel Journal of a Painter: Inspiring places in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This write up focuses on the travel journal of a painter, influences that inspire documentations of memorable places in sketches, with a disposition for models and horses, markets and aerial views around Nigeria. It symbolizes a critical attempt at visualizing events from place to place. These sketches prepare the painter with ready materials for paintings over a period of time and in some instance the information (elements of design) garnered could sustain the enthusiasm on a subject-matter. Findings have shown that sketches for a work can be drawn from multiple sources to guide in expression. The outcome of the journey of the travel artist is reflected in a journal.

INTRODUCTION

It is known that artists experience varieties of forms and images in different settings, cultures and develop them either on site or in the studio. The interest to paint and document certain important locations and sites have prompted artists to accept challenges of exploring places of the great convergence of elements of design. Artists travel to places of interest, tourist sites, monuments, museums and even other countries. Visual travelling is an essential part of the artistic development process as it entails moving from one location to another. It can serve as a means of gathering, collecting references for future use in the studio while others are left as the artist' sketches. Davidson (2011), asserts that

Contemporary artists increasingly see that drawing is something unique and different from painting. It is an intense, sensitive, compelling, personal, and utterly direct art form, one with its own concepts, characteristics, and techniques. In addition, contemporary drawing is not regulated by any particular imagery, but instead encompasses a diversity of attacks, including realist, abstract, modernist, and post-modernist.

Some artist's recordings in the course of their journeys' have enthused interest and encouraged more ingenious works. A record of the creative process in an art journal can lead to new understanding and ways of developing concepts.

Paul Klee is one artist who developed his artistic process through the journey and contact with images and colors from Tunisia in 1914. This experience made him to declare colour has taken hold of me; no longer do I have to chase after it. I know that it has hold of me forever. Colour and I are one. I am a painter.' This is the kind of perceptual experience which generates ideas for artists and drive motivation to articulate expression. It can also sustain the flair of an artist in creating interesting works.

Why Keep an Artist Journal?

According to Johnson (2014), Keeping a journal allows us to capture the days and seconds as they race by, celebrate our lives-our families and acquaintances, our pets, travels, observations and more-create a lasting record you will value always. Maintaining a daily note of events calls for dedication and adequate training. Dart (2006) describes an art journal as a record of daily thoughts, a travel journal, an exercise or diet diary, a dream journal, a place where to jot down goals or to-do lists, and nearly any record to keep in a book or notebook

Meredith Malone (Curator), 2012, affirms that, tying is a medium that provides an informal and open area for imaginative elaboration, in which concepts and ideas can emerge and change with relative rest. Uninhibited by the obligation to create a finished and independent object, as is traditionally

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associated with painting and sculpture, drawing as a medium lends itself readily to the theoretical and the experimental.

Artists through the ages have been known to move from place to place to capture fleeting moments due to different reasons. This kind of movement has great influences on the artist's works and ideas because of the nature of a place. The travelling artist is always faced and exposed to different influences (images) from the environment which makes it mandatory to take notes. These notes are in the form of sketches and drawings. The expressions of these notes are sometimes seen as finished works because of their rendering. The events recorded in a travel Journal are in some instances transitory or ephemeral in nature. Capturing the essential is therefore very important in notes taking. Gray and Malins (2004), asserts that the principle of a 'journal' is that it is a store- a depository for a range of information in a range of media, which is added to and consulted on a regular basis. They further contend that the 'journal may contain different types of information- activity and development log, diary, documentation of work in progress, contextual references, information about the pace and progress of work, key points from evaluation and analysis, and other kind of relevant 'life' information.

Paul Gauguin traverses from place to place recording the environment that influenced him. According to Kleiner and Mamiya, (2005), the South Pacific Island attracted Gauguin because it offered him a life far removed from materialistic Europe and an opportunity to reconnect with nature in Tahiti. Gauguin tried to maintain his vision of an untamed paradise by moving to the Tahitian countryside, where he expressed his fascination with primitive life and brilliant color in a series of striking decorative canvases.

Documenting Memorable Places in the Journal of a Painter

Artists are drawn to document different locations around the globe. Memorable places serve as stimuli for the artist's quest for a new construct in the domain of practice. One of the most inspiring events in an artist's career is travelling from Northern part of Nigeria to Lagos the nation's economic capital. It is the hub of art activities in Africa, according to the owner of Alexis galleries in Lagos. One of the features of this place, is many people and yellow buses littering the entire landscape, especially at Oshodi, Idumota, Yaba and other places. High rise buildings and brown roofs are a sight to behold. The interest generated from the Lagos environment over the years is overwhelming even for those who have never been there. Capturing these events in the drawing of this densely populated city in the artist travelling Journal can be an exciting experience. The possibilities are endless, just as the activities are not static, but changes with time of the day. The drawings/sketches in the Journal are all on A4 size of 21x29cm.

Sketches



THE MARKET PLACES

Growing up in the market place opened up the inspirations for these studies. Nigerian artists of all genres have painted scenes from different markets that represent the article of trade of such places. Kolade Oshinowo, Abiodun Olaku, Dele Jegede, Gani Odutokun and a host of others have been inspired by market activities. They found markets to be inspiring to document with its fascinating atmosphere. The market places are always in ever dynamic mood and filled with activities reflecting bustling and hustling of colours and value. According to Dajuma (2010), the market in Nigeria is a place where people come to do several things, including buying and selling, meeting, begging,

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socializing and where the latest gossips are heard. The market provides an interactive setting between cultures of urban and rural, rich and poor. The movement is inspiring for artistic expression. The pedestrian movements in different direction create an architectural formation within the market. Umbrellas are arranged in an uncoordinated manner, covering the heads of the sellers and sometimes the buyers with little spaces to accommodate their frames. One can only see dotted heads of moving people enhanced by dark shades. Noticeable items in the market are colourful display of wares – tomatoes, pepper, clothing, palm oil, onions, salt and many others. A crowded market especially in big cities Lagos, Kaduna and Kano is characterized by both Vehicular and human movements. It is a common spot for interchanges, criss-crossing and sometimes disorder in situations where trouble looms.

Sketches



MY MODEL

Studies of the models were done from different positions in the course of the artist’s journey. What does an artist see in a model? A model is seen as a subject for artistic rendition possessing certain

inspiring characteristics. When a model fit into the intention of the artist, the urge to sketch or paint is immediately fired up in the artist. According to Maidman (2010), the model is not a reference object, but a living, breathing person who informs your work so long as he or she is present. Every work therefore is a collaboration between the artist and the model to convey a story. Many a times, the shape and pose of a model inspire the artist. The fascination with this particular model is because her pose. She is flexible at every turn, she moves and smiles at each time she changes her pose. Her elegant frame and face structure is an added advantage to choosing her as a model.

Sketches



AERIAL VIEW (ROOF –TOPS)

One the most interesting subject is the aerial view of especially a particular old town or city with rusty brown roofs. The rectangular shapes of each roof are very interesting to behold from a distance. Rooftops can also be viewed from a height to capture its essence. The views of roof-tops were captured from a two storey building at Oshodi, Lagos state. Nigeria. The area is congested with vehicular and human activities. The depictions of these abstract shapes create an ethereal fusion because of the variation of value and contrast. Urban centres like Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta are places with inspiring roof-tops. The houses are in clusters with virtually hardly any space in between them. The environments of these places are haphazardly organized. The brown rusted roofs tell an artist a story of an environment patterned in graphic proliferation of shapes.

George (2015), describes Ibadan aerial view thus, the panoramic views of the ancient cityscape of Ibadan is characteristic of brown roofs spread and sprawled, racing into the distant horizon, kissing the dull blue skies at the skyline. In Ibadan, jutting gracefully out of the tight collage is rust-brown roofs. This description of Ibadan fits into cities like Abeokuta and Lagos from an aerial view because of their crowd together structures and rusted roofs.

Sketches



HORSES (STUDIES FOR DURBAR)

Equestrian forms are found to be very interesting subject for artistic articulation. The horse is seen as a dynamic animal, full of action and carrying an aura of royalty. To the travel Journal artist, this is an interesting subject especially those whose interest is in capturing action/motion. Studying this subject-matter is one that propels the artist to paint.

Danjuma (2012) and Lababidi (2013) writings on durbar reveals that it is a festival celebrated in several cities of Northern Nigeria. It is organized in cities such as Kano, Katsina, Bauchi, Zaria and many others. It is also known to be organized when important dignitaries (Heads of government), governors pay visits to the Emir. During this time artists take time to have a view of Durbar for artistic expression. Durbar festivals in Katsina are one speculated to be the most beautiful and spectacular because of its array of colourful displays. During the Sallah Day in Katsina, a Durbar procession of horsemen to the public square is done in the front of the Emir's palace. It is a sight that every artist would like to capture in his or her journal. The Emir and his fabulous regalia sit majestically receiving salutation and homage from his subjects. The festival begins with each group racing across the square at full gallop, swords glinting raise in the sun. The Emir with the palace chiefs and regimental guards, the Dogari are shown in procession. This fanfare is intensified by drumming, dancing and singing, a fascinating scene to behold.

It has been widely painted by Nigerian artists especially Edosa Oguigo, Abiodun Olaku, Gani Odutokun and many others. In the course of travels, artists visit locations where durbar is held to document actions with camera and journal for sketches. Oguigo says between 1985/86, 'I saw a lot of Durba festival- where the king and his convoy parade on the streets... The horses in the procession are draped in all sorts of rich decorations to the point that you can hardly see the form of the charging horse. Most actions capture relationship of forms moving in and out in a spontaneous thrust.

Sketches



CONCLUSION

Nigeria is a large country with inspirational places for artistic articulation. The drawings in this artist journal are conglomeration of ideas generated to be developed in the studio for paintings. The mode of generating the art journal is based on diversity of ideas peculiar to the environment where the artist visited. The new forms and expressions are statement inherent as quality of notes based on the artist perception of illusionary space. It is expected that these journal will inspire artists to develop their own art journal.

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