

AN ANALYSIS OF RHYTHM AND YORUBA CULTURAL ASPECTS IN THE WORKS OF KUNLE FILANI

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Abstract

Traditional Yoruba artistic heritage has a rich repertoire of motifs, forms, and colour with deep symbolic meanings often used in communicating thoughts and ideas. In modern Nigerian art, a recourse to cultural iconography has always influenced artistic creation. This paper therefore examines the rhythmic organization of forms using the Yoruba cultural iconography which characterizes the works of Kunle Filani, whose works draw significantly on the philosophy of Yoruba tradition. Thirteen paintings have been purposefully selected for evaluation and analysis using the simple random method and the formal analysis technique. Findings reveal that Filani uses motifs, signs and symbols creatively as visual similes and metaphors to communicate thoughts and ideas. Filani also uses his art to make positive statements which have generated curious public reactions. This paper concludes that cultural content and context can induce socio-cultural development and serve as veritable tool to preserve and advance the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people as evident in Filani's work.

Key Words: Culture, Content, Motifs, Style, *Qnà*, Yoruba Art

Introduction

Rhythm is an elemental principle in the arts that connotes distinct but regular pattern in music, poetry and visual arts. Performing arts consist of music, drama, and dance, while literary or liberal arts capture subjects like languages, prose and poetry. The visual arts have drawing, painting, and sculpture as "fine arts" with pure aesthetic tendencies while ceramics, graphics and textile designs share functional tendencies. While performing arts can be appreciated via senses of sight and hearing, literary art is perceived through the sense of hearing and the visual arts through the sight (visual/vision) organ. Graves (1951) observes that, rhythm is a pattern of beat and emphasis is in music. In prose writing, the rhythmic impulse prompts the balance of sentences and the agreement of words, in the manner that rhyme contribute to rhythmic effect in poetry. He asserts further that, rhythm is a basic attribute governing structure in prose and poetry. This also applies to the flow of movement and sound in music as well as the arrangement of the elements of design in visual arts.

Rhythm in visual art is the creative application of the principles of art; and the recurrent organization of elements of design to create visual appeal. Similarly, the principle may be used to create an effect of contrast when contrasting elements are organized in some aesthetic manner. Whistler (2006) sees the relationship between music and art such that, "the artist is borne to pick, choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chord, until he brings forth from chaos to glorious harmony". Rhythmic harmony has remained the constant search and research of Kunle Filani as he combines, organizes and adapts traditional forms for production of aesthetic art. In the visual arts, rhythm as a principle of art is closely related to movement. Whistler (2006) further described this as the art of careful and deliberate placement of repeated elements in a work of art similar to a visual tempo of beat in music. Often, rhythm is used as visual varieties when combined with elements such as line, shape, space, colour and texture for creative organization of works of arts.

This study documents Kunle Filani who consistently investigates and uses Yoruba cultural iconography to invigorate his works by carefully combining lines, form, shape and colour to fascinate his audience to the visual beat of his painting. These he juxtaposed to achieve a unity of expression in which the individuality of parts is rhythmically lost in the total effect of a complete composition of visual appeal (Babatunde, 1987).

Culture as basis for transformations

Modern culture covers all facets of human life: from the food we eat, the cloth, language, proverbs, dance and technology and so on. Culture is not static; its evolvement draws from the changing faces of the immediate and global environment that produce it. Today, cultural boundary is becoming vast arising from technology and globalization. The impact of technology has had significant turn on global culture with Africa at the receiving end; African youths seem to consume everything foreign products and values to the detriment of the rich African culture. This is noticeable in our music, fashion, food, language with an increasing flair and taste for foreign products.

Peoples' cultural heritage connects them with the present to project the future. Fọlárànmí (2003) has observed that, when a people break from their cultural past, a gap is created that to bridge becomes difficult if not impossible. This is currently true with the entertainment industry where music, dance and fashion, reveal significant gaps arising from the cultural disconnect. This is evident in the lack of "Africaness" in the lyrics and videos resulting in the dearth of morality and modesty. These are alien to Africa, and thus reveals socio-cultural disconnect from our cultural past which portends great danger for future generation if unchecked. Nudity and the open display of vulgarity are alien to the Africans as it is widespread in the Nigerian entertainment platform. The entertainment industry, film and music like the visual arts remain viable and authentic platforms for projecting African culture and to this extent; through art, Africa has been succinctly and culturally documented that Bascom (1973) also observed that, the greatest contribution of Africans to world art is in her rich cultural heritage. This has thus debunked the earlier made-belief that Africans have no past and that African history started with European advent. Fọlárànmí (2003) observed that, in trying to interpret the world and create a better society, artists provide for us forms and colours which we encounter and consume, but they also communicate and document historic events.

A visual form is a visual language that is easy to understand and interpret when motifs, forms and symbols drawn from an array of the people's material culture are adapted for use. These collections of symbolic images and designs on crafts like spun and dyed fabrics, calabash and pottery decoration, mats, sculptures, shrine paintings and more have been with us for ages. This indigenous iconography is drawn from the rich Yoruba philosophy of poetry, story, and proverbs and are used as visual language in synthesis with modern forms, colours, material and techniques by Kunle Filani to communicate cultural thoughts and ideas. It is with this resolve that Filani with conscious and deliberate intent turns out works that project "Africanity".

Folaranmi (2003) has further observed that the dynamics of culture when positively harnessed have assisted man to study and put together his past, shape his present to give a prosperous future. To this end, little benefit has been harnessed from culture thereby limiting the successes gained through traditional arts, culture and technology that produced the various Nigerian art sculptures though capable of jump starting African development.

This cultural emancipation was vehemently and tenaciously pursued by the "Zaria rebels" who led the campaign for recourse to traditional African philosophy. This was catalyzed by a conscious desire for dynamic adaptation of traditional images and symbols to evolve stylistic distinction which characterized contemporary Nigerian art (Olodi 2001, Okeke 1979, and Piston, 1998). According to Filani (2001), the pre-independence artistic form of the "Zarianist" was fueled by their fascination with some aspects of foreign culture and the retention of some indigenous ways of life, this fusion of sorts was called a "natural synthesis" of cultures. The "natural synthesis" crusade grew from Zaria School to Nsukka School with Uli-influenced Aka group, an adaptation of body and wall painting was followed by the Ona group, a movement that adapted the Yoruba decorative elements from the "Ife Art School". It is however from the Ife School of Art that Kunle Filani emerged and has since continued with vigor and tenacity to impress his artistic impact on the sands of time.

A culturally informed people can only progress on the continuity of her virtues and values which are conveyed through folklore, poetry, proverbs, respect, integrity, and hard work. A People's cultural heritage must be preserved and documented in order to serve as a vehicle that can connect the present and project the future. Traditional Yoruba artistic heritage has a rich repertoire of images, which have and are being used to communicate and document victories and progress made within the cultural backdrop of the Yoruba. Art works owe more of their

uniqueness to the way the artist uses the elements and principles of design to communicate. Artists creatively and aesthetically order the elements of art into harmonious wholes using the principles of art that result in designs skillfully blended to appeal to human vision.

Evolution of Cultural Motifs and Symbols in Kunle's Paintings

Emanuel Olakunle Filani was born on 8th September, 1957 to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Ogunmoroti Filani of Ikole-Ekiti, Ekiti State. Filani started his elementary education at Bishop Akinyele Primary School, Ibadan from 1967. In 1969, he moved to St. Peter's Primary School, Ikole-Ekiti. His secondary education was between 1969 and 1974 at Doherty memorial Grammar School, Ijero-Ekiti. He studied to earn a degree in Fine Arts at the University of Ife, (now Obafemi Awolowo University) between 1976 and 1980.

Filani is an *Onaist* by deliberation; a significant member of the "Ona" group, an off-shoot of the Ife art school whose pioneer members include Kunle Filani, Tola Wewe, Moyo Okediji, Bolaji Campbell, and Tunde Nassiru. Ona according to Okediji, (1989) is a Yoruba word that refers to "decoration, pattern, ornament, embellishment, design, composition, plan, and motif". All these constitute the elements, with which the members are known, they believe that "appropriate inward looking should be done by the artist to examine the form and content of their work..." (Daimyo, 2000). The arts, crafts, and philosophy then remain the repertoire from which they draw forms, colours and inspiration, to communicate aesthetic or socio-cultural thought.

Kunle Filani was greatly influenced by his brothers who studied arts in school certificate examination; Ademuleya (2007) has observed that, whenever they were at home on holidays, they practiced art with Kunle. This was the foundation upon which his artistic interest was laid; from that time, his interest in art neither waned nor deterred. The learning atmosphere at home and in school was also conducive. His parents never prevailed upon his choice of career like many parents who would influence their wards to be Lawyers, Medical Doctors, Accountants and so on. His principal and the art teacher also made art learning for him and his colleagues competitive and attractive thus, helping to nurture their creative talent, leading them to success. At the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, his artistic perception was sharpened by access to elective courses offered in the Faculties of Arts (like Religion, English, Literature Philosophy and Social Sciences). Ademuleya (2007) has observed that, the courses laid the foundation for his intellectual balance in criticism and art theory. In the Fine Arts Department were also scholars like Babatunde Lawal, Abiodun Roland, J.R.O. Ojo, Agbo Folarin and others who whetted his mind and guided his skills in the theory and practice of art laid upon the University's motto: "for learning and culture". The stage plays by Ola Rotimi and music performances that displayed Nigeria's rich culture greatly influenced Kunle.

Filani once noted that the mixed grill of seasoned lecturers and impactful courses actually motivated a number of the students during his time towards the realization of the relevance of culture in theatre, music and African languages as well as the fine arts. He further observed the thought of Abiodun Roland that "a practice could not advance without ensuring that theory is properly engaged" (Filani, 2003:10). All this no doubt influenced the deliberate and conscious mindedness of Filani towards African culture and philosophy which has significantly broadened his artistic horizon in form rendering and composition. Filani affirms that the Ife Art School laid the foundation of his artistic endeavour and prepared him in terms of skill and concept; Munio Makuchi and Professor Clary Nelson Cole also influenced him immensely in terms of form and dedication to art. In terms of innovativeness, he identified Dr. Bruce Onabrakpeya while the hard work of David Dale influenced his creative development.

After his graduate studies and his mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) with Kano Teachers College between 1980 and 1981, Filani picked up a job as an art teacher at Saint Louis School, Owo. Thereafter, he proceeded to the University of Benin where he obtained a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in printmaking where he was taught by art scholars like Professor Solomon Wangboje, Clary Nelson Cole among others. His MFA project report focused on creative experiments which resulted in the invention of petro-polystyrene technique upon completion in 1984.

In 1995, he bagged a postgraduate Diploma in Education from the University of Lagos. He moved to the Department of Fine Arts, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo in 1985 where he rose to become the Head of Department, in 1992. He later transferred his service to the

Department of Fine Arts, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos. With a high quest for learning and desire for lifelong learning, Filani proceeded in 2002 to the Institute of African Studies, the University of Ibadan, under the supervision of Professor Cornelius Oyeleke Adepsegba in pursuit of his PhD degree in African Art Studies.

Identification and selection of relevant culture-based paintings

Onaism is an artistic ideological thought which readapts traditional Yoruba decorative elements into contemporary Yoruba art and aesthetics; they adapt indiscernable manner motifs and symbols derived from indigenous arts and crafts as decorative patterns on their canvasses. Aside from the adaptation of Yoruba iconography in rendering his visual “music”, Kunle portrays linear characters reminiscent of his background as a graphic designer major with painting as his minor. Filani lyrically uses line as significant factor in creative combination with brilliant colours and other design elements to delight his audience using pleasant rhythm of rich cultural forms. Okediji (1989) aptly observes that, Kunle “is a brilliant colourist who has fully mastered a unique approach to composition essentially based on the use of linear designs, suffused with harmonious chromes and shapes. His themes are multivalent and “unrealistic”, threading the thin lines between abstraction and realism”. Ademuleya (2007) notes that, while Kunle was younger, he combined inquisitiveness with restlessness as he was fond of querying elders and demanding clarifications on issues past his age. His curiosity influenced his innate interest in exploring the theory and practice of art as evident in his current works. Kunle has mastered the use of forms as visual metaphor to symbolize abstract images as a connection between verbal and visual language which when sighted reveals endless horizon of meaning (Curl, 1997). For Filani, art is a phenomenon which generates idea in the minds, whose form communicates by creating flashes and grills on the faces with symbolic meanings. Art is used as a universal form of communication and as a language; meaningful art can be presented to produce records that document events in space and time.

From his days at Ife to the birth and nurture of *Ona*, Filani has remained committed to the modernization and promotion of Yoruba indigenous forms and motifs as significant elements and trends in creative adaptation in two-dimensional representation. He has remained an unwavering member of the *Ona* group researching into the theory and practice of the adaptation of forms and patterns and the ensuing philosophies that birth it. His PhD Thesis affirms his resolve for Yoruba indigenous artistic tradition and aesthetics by providing literature on the subject in African art studies thereby pushing farther the frontier knowledge.

Kunle Filani is an enthusiastic personality with robust creative intellect in theory and practice. He is a master at setting equilibrium in activities such as academics, administration and practice, a rare skill. He is a versatile artist who strives to maintain a balance between restiveness and patience; from where he developed the power of focus and planning, the virtue that developed in him the ability to achieve more by doing little. Filani is an abstractionist; the imports and inclusions of traditional decorative elements not only remind the viewers about their sources but also refresh their connections to modern visual forms.

Filani contextually and thematically draws experiences from his micro and macro environment of the Yoruba and African aesthetic philosophy, and absolves its morality; and draws contents from the world. His adaptation is not limited to the use of motifs and symbols. He also researched into diverse uses of materials which have resulted in a new vista of visual approach in painting leading to new visual appeal. On material improvisation, Filani solves the problems of scarcity by sourcing and adopting local materials as alternatives. He may not be alone doing this; some contemporary Nigerian artists like him also adapt native motifs in their works from indigenous art and crafts from available material cultures. His obsession and love for texturized surfaces he achieved sometimes by using Yoruba *Aso-Oke* fabrics on his canvas or as surface. Sometimes he adds fine sawdust, mixed with gouache and glue as binding to achieve texturized surface effect, but in the recent times he uses acrylic and oil paints on the canvas.

Filani's strength is in the use of lines which would be treasured seeing his numerous drawings and paintings; his use of lines is legendary; with so much perfection, his skillful treatment of forms in pen, ink and charcoal, he may have developed in printmaking. His drawings are commentaries reflecting everyday activities of socio-cultural and political occurrences and historical landmarks. Filani's drawings are characterized by multifarious compartmentalization

of forms in his compositions. Ademuleya (2003) notes that there are bits of visible different compositions within the major compositions; his drawings seem to have been done in series with each theme linking with the other in a manner that the forms are rhythmically connected in visual structure like it is in music as depicted in *"Rhythm of Moonlight Supplication"* (Plate 5). In his paintings, having emerged from abstraction; he renders his human figures in naturalism as depicted in *"Oju-ona Cross my Heart"* (Plate 2) and *"Rhythm of Moonlight Supplication"* (Plate 5). In others Filani renders human forms closely knit together and often superimposed in a manner that it overlaps clumsy decorated patterns on a contrasting and appealing background. For example, in *"Congress of Violence"* (Plate 10), the treatment of his figural forms reveals his strong affinity for elongated figures as seen in *"My Garment of Honour"* (Plate 6) and *"After the Service"* (Plate 11). Filani's love for elongated human figure is legendary, perhaps because he is tall himself, beyond that sometimes; he also represents his figural forms in silhouette. This is represented in *"My Garment of Honour"* (Plate 6) and *"Congress of violence"* (Plate 10). His silhouette genre is recurrently rhythmical he seems to weave his silhouette forms into one another while the figures are seen flowing into the background-like weaved wave of the sea; with prosody of decorative patterns on the entire canvas.

Filani through practice has mastered the theories of colour, but he is by nature a temperate personality, he is naturally calm, warm and tender and this to a large extent influences his palette which is usually bright and warm. He is also enthused by texturized surfaces which may be tactile or visual. To achieve it, he adds fine sawdust mixed with bright tempera paint on certain areas of his canvas; better still he may also paste fabric patterns to accomplish certain mixed-media effects as rendered in *"Thou Shall Not"* (Plate 12).

Thematic Appraisal of Filani's Works

Theme in a work of art is similar to the title of a book or record label, simply, it gives the overview and the essence of a work. Themes may be influenced by personal experiences or by the environment. Images form pictorial elements that the artist presents to communicate his thought in response to the agitation that prompted the work as his contribution to the public discuss on environmental concern. Artists as historians, musicians or commentators present to the public their message through visual elements, forms, patterns and colours. Curl (1997) citing Schafer, notes that, "when simple forms are repeated they bring to the eye the kind of pleasure that music brings to the ear". The rhythm of Filani's artworks therefore, like music give the same pleasure that music presents to the ear. Curl further states that, an artist is not a special kind of person; but every person is a kind of artist, and Filani seems to be an artist with a distinctive style, method and technique of expression that sets him apart from his contemporaries.

The Ona group from the Ife Art School of which Kunle Filani is a major player is influenced by Yoruba art and aesthetic, but his focus covers socio-cultural, political, religious and economic facets of human activities. Akanni and Olanipekun (1991) observe that, "most of Filani's works are sharp, socio-political commentaries; they are rendered in far-fetched metaphorical language which challenges the sense of reasoning... Filani, they concluded, celebrates culture by depicting with deft craftsmanship and rousing emotions". Filani was born into culture, nurtured by a culture-sensitive people and largely studied Yoruba indigenous art and aesthetics which has sharpened his thought and shaped his perception which has significantly influenced his practice.

The themes in Kunle Filani's paintings are classified into five namely: religious, social, economic, cultural and political themes as shown in Plates 6 to 9, which deal with religious themes, Plates 4, 5 and 11 deals with socio-political themes, plates 1, 2 and 3 deals with cultural themes while Plate 8 is economically centered.



Plate 1: The Three Stages, (1984), Medium: Linocut, Kunle Filani

In *"The Three Stages"*, (Plate 1) Filani reminds us of the three stages in life which spread across all spheres. The maxim, life's race is not a sprint but a marathon holds true revealing the three seasons of life: morning, afternoon, and night. The devotion to one ultimately affects the others. The good investment in virtues and right values the mornings of one's life will advance the afternoon and positively progress the night, but to refuse to invest in one will affect the others. Experiences plays vital role in life where it is adapted but where it is rejected such a person pays dearly for it by learning hard lessons in the process.

The work is a linocut produced in 1984 when he bagged an MFA degree in Printmaking at the University of Benin. His dexterity in handling his tool can be appreciated in the treatment of the forms in the prints. He uses thick white outlines on the three figures to indicate the direction of light; the figure semblance of human and tortoise in posture. In folklore, mythology and religion, tortoise in stories, among the Yoruba depicts a trickster. It exhibits a great deal of intellect or knowledge and is often adapted to teach morality. It is very likely that Filani's mastery of the printmaking tools which are cutting knives may have influenced his skill in achieving precisions in lines and curves as seen in *"The Three Stages"* (Plate 1).



Plate 2: Relics of Grandma, (2003), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

In the *"Relics of Grandma"* (Plate 2), Filani connects with the past to draw inspiration and wisdom from the experienced. He celebrates family values and virtues which affirm his love for culture and tradition. He uses patterns of *Aso-Oke* fabric which he spreads on the canvas like a mat to present the unique position of women in the family and society at large. He recalls the era when the Yoruba people lived in self-governed and organized society (government) before contact with the West. Then, the society progressed significantly lacking nothing with all the needs of the people provided by them. They had established a textile industry from where

various *Aso-oke* brands and *adire* another type of Yoruba fabric craft locally produced. From their cotton plantation, they spanned yarn and weaved it into various fabrics. They also produced their dyes, made designs and dyed spun fabrics locally, but all these seem to have gone simply because the advent and subsequent meddling of the modern government system. Today, most functioning cotton and automated industries of the past have either collapsed or relocated out of the country to societies with power and where things seem to be working like Ghana and South Africa. However, all locally produced Nigerian goods seem to have given ways for imported materials from Asia thereby further snuffing the life out of the few struggling industries.

On the canvas in (Plate 2), are two smaller patterns spread out like mats on which are zoomorphic objects like comb “*ooya*”, lizard, “*alaamu*”, snake “*ejo*”, chameleon, “*oga*” stool “*apoti*” and axe “*aake*”. These objects have great significance in the Yoruba mythology. Comb “*ooya*” is an object of beauty “*ewa*” which every woman holds dear, it is used in crafting different indigenous hairstyles in honour of the head “*ori*”. Hair adornment is often made by women to please her man who is regarded as the “*ade ori aya*” authority over the woman. The beauty of the female gender is often valued beyond the physical qualities which among the Yoruba are believed to be more intrinsic than physical and supported by the maxim, “*iwalewa*” integrity is beautiful.”

The zoomorphic objects also carry symbolic meaning, for example snake “*ejo*” symbolizes protection more than a threat because it appears in indigenous designs for women (Ademuleya 2003; Carr 2001). Snakes could also represent fierceness, truth, long-life, regeneration and wealth among others. Chameleons are distinct and intriguing species of lizards with remarkable characteristics; it could also symbolize resourcefulness, sensitivity, patience, insight, curiosity, stability, change and many more which are of significant values to femininity. Lizard, “*alaamu*” just like the Chameleon is vital in ritual animals to prepare efficient medicines.

The stool is an object mostly used in the kitchen often cherished by women, to feminism; good food that comes from a woman’s kitchen leads to a man’s heart. Any woman that will last in marriage must have learnt enough from the mother to be able to mentor others. The power of women in procreation is not only treasured in birth but also in the provision of food for sustenance of life is better produced in the kitchen which houses the *apoti*. The dominant colours in the work are shades of yellow which are feminine, tending towards gold “*wura*” which mothers are to their children (Ademuleya, 2003). In all, the golden virtues as represented by those objects when passed from generation to generation ensure continuity and socio-cultural progress.

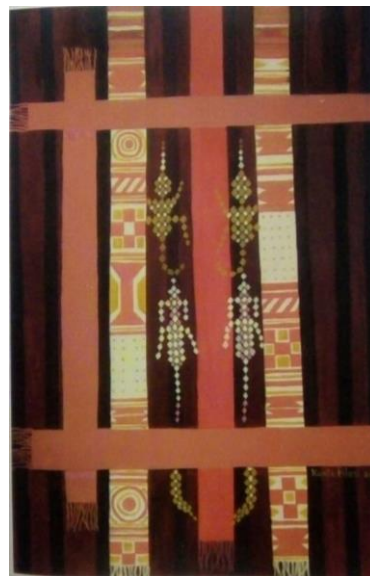


Plate 3: Vestigial Texture, (2003), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

Words like patterns, texture, rhythm, and vestige often reflect on his themes. “*Vestigial Texture*” (Plate 3), reveals Fulani’s love for texture which he achieved by texturizing his canvas with fine sawdust and glue to achieve a textile effect. Sometimes he deliberately paints such sensual effect like in “*Fortune is Mine*” (Plate 8), “*Relics of Grandma*” (Plate 2) and “*Oju-ona: Cross My Heart*”

(Plate 4). Filani's PhD's thesis focused on the "Adaptation of Indigenous Forms and Motifs by Contemporary Yoruba Artists". This reveals his deep-seated resolve to uplift African art and aesthetics to an appreciable and acceptable standard internationally; as an experimental and explorative artist, Filani's works are geared toward re-positioning African art futuristically. In the bid not to allow indigenous forms, motifs, symbols, patterns, and other designs to go into extinction. He submits that he explores indigenous forms and motifs of fabric fibers to subject them to contemporary interpretation and exploitation of cultural sophistication with a view to stimulating his audience (Filani, 2003).



Plate 4: Oju-ona: Cross My Heart, (2007), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

"Oju-ona: Cross my Heart" (Plate 4) celebrates beauty and femininity. The concepts of beauty to the Yoruba particularly as it affects women are two folds; one is the outward seen and appreciated by the physical eyes. "*oju ita* or *oju ara*". Two is the inner beauty to be appreciated by the inner eye, "*oju inu*". While "*oju ara*" accesses everything that meets the eye with respect to outward adornment, "*oju inu*" accesses the intrinsic values and virtues of good character, "*iwa rere*" such as calmness, "*iwa tutu*" gentleness, "*iwa pele*", respect, "*iteriba*" among others which the Yoruba regards as desirable—*iwa lewa omo enyan* meaning good character is human beauty. In traditions, the Yoruba body adornment include the wearing of gorgeous dress "*aso didara*" hair braiding "*irun didi*", and hair threading "*irun kiko*" of various styles and sometimes comes with facial masks often adorned by some men. The artist reflects on the new trends which cross-cultures have brought in contact with the African culture. In the place of the former, are hair styles such as perming, jerry curling, and in more recent times hairdos made with attachments and different wig designs worn by women today. Beautiful eyes "*oju-ona*" is always attractive to every rational person. Characteristic of Filani, he decorates the face with the design patterns "*ise ona*" that compliments the face so it can cross the heart of every beholder. Ona is a Yoruba word meaning "style" with a broad application which could also refer to the use of motifs, signs, symbols, patterns and ornamental elements used in designs.

In the traditional Yoruba society, supplication is very significant among the people in relating with the Almighty God "*Olodumare*". Alana (2004) observes that, belief in God, divinities, ancestors; metaphysics "*idan*", medicine "*oogun*" constitute five elements of Yoruba religion. To appease the gods in the case of any unpleasantness divination is sought by Ifa priest to the gods on what is needed to be done to bring normalcy. Spirits are believed to be both malevolent and benevolent depending on how they are related to; the Yoruba believes' that the ancestors can do both evil and good. If offended, they can cause disruption and calamity for the offenders. Once the Ifa speaks, his injunctions must be observed by sacrifice, to be carried out by a priest for peace to return. Kunle Filani weaves up a complex web of *ona* patterns on the cloths and bodies of the worshippers as well as the background to bring about rhythmic visual wholesomeness.



Plate 5: Dew on our Drum, (2007), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

Filani in the “*Dew on our Drum*” (Plate 5) portrays two drummers who are music makers. The Yoruba are lovers of good music and they also make fascinating music. Music in Africa is one of the oldest important social expressions, among the Yoruba in particular. In Yorubaland, music is aesthetically adorned and it has formed a source of livelihood for those who make music. The Yoruba “talking drum” *gangan*, an hourglass (double membrane) is used as a means of communication using signals that has to be decoded for the hearer to understand. (Bade 2005) has observed that, to understand the signal of the talking drum, one must be familiar with the language of the immediate community, else it would be misrepresented. Kunle here presents the two drummers in striking action posture.

The first drummer has the *gangan* of a medium size and the smaller of the ensemble is called the *kannango* under the *dundun* set. Both drums have straps made of cloth with which the drums are hung on the neck or shoulder to the side with drumming stick held with the other hand; this presents him as the lead drummer. The second drummer carries only one. Drummers sing the praises of people and often the “*oriki*” forms the basis of formal praise poetry (Folaranmi, 2002); in turn they are awesomely rewarded depending on their mastery of the job. The dew on their drums seem to depict a long hour of doing what they know to do best; which is to make people happy and dance while they forget their sorrow. Names like Ayandepo, Ayangade, Ayanbola among others are names beard by people from the family of drummers among the Yoruba.



**Plate 6: Patterns of Honour (II), (2003)
Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani**



**Plate 7: My Garment of Honour, (2007)
Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani**

A Yoruba maxim “*Ise lo’gun ise*” meaning hard work is the antidote to poverty presents to us all the vital place of hard work which is capable of chasing away poverty. A country whose workforce is primed in integrity and hard work will be listed among the committee of great

nations like India, Indonesia, South Korea and China. In the past, decency, hard work and integrity was the yardstick for the conferment of titles and honours on people, today, these virtues and values seem to have been thrown to the dogs; ill-gotten wealth seem to be the hallmark for honourability. "Pattern of Honour" presents the illustration how intricate painful and tasking it is to attain the position of honour, while "My Garment of Honour" presents the glamour, beauty and gain deserved when the prize is paid as portrayed in the brilliant use of colours.



Plate 8: Rhythm of the Moonlight Supplications, (1997), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

In the "*Rhythm of the Moonlight Supplications*" (Plate 8), Filani rhythmically interlocks his designs in an interrelationship of fascinating visual poetry. The expression on their faces beams with flashes of the moon light, seemingly to suggest that their prayer has been answered. Supplication is the phenomenon found in all races at all times and it is intended to solve the challenges of life whenever it arises. It is the general belief for the Yoruba to consult the *Ifa* through the Priest on seemingly trivial issues as what profession should be pursued, who to marry, where to live, whether to embark on a journey and more sensitive affairs as who succeeds the Oba after his demise. This divine search has averted severe consequences that may arise from willful mortal decisions.



Plate 9: Fortune is Mine, (2003), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

The painting (Plate 9) "*Fortune is Mine*", depicts an Ifa divination board with a human face at the top and motifs designs and two naira signs at the two bottom end enclosed within the circle. At the centre is divining chain called "*opele*". This is what the Ifa Priest use for divination to inquire from *Olodumare* the Supreme God. Fortune which also confers honour is the desire of all; it includes the acquisition of great wealth or property; a large amount of financial wealth or other material possessions. Fortune has many sources which include inheritance, good luck, hard

work or other illegal and dubious means like stealing, fraud, bribe and so on. Of all these sources, only hard work remains most honorable means; fortune well gotten tends to carry great value and last longer. However, how many fortunes has clean source?



Plate 10: The Lord is my Shepherd, (2001), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

Prayer may be expressed as either spoken or unspoken words made to a deity or saint but in this circumstance it is to Supreme God. *"The Lord is my shepherd"* (Plate 10) is a prayer in the Bible taken from the Psalms whose author is David, the second king of Israel. As a shepherded boy, David here shared his experience on the important role of keeping his father's flock, though he was the youngest of eight male children. When occasion presented itself to confront Goliath he never vacillated. Initially, Saul doubted David's ability, but when he presented the testimonial of how God had delivered him from the paws of lions and bears which he had killed and used that as a standard against Goliath which worked out. Filani's understanding of the dynamics of prayer is presented as a way of receiving divine guidance and protection. In *"The Lord is My Shepherd"* (Plate 9), Filani depicted the figures in silhouette, using orange and yellow shades for the sheep below, the circular forms on the top represents the sun throwing it's light, the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images below to suggest divine guidance. He divides the canvas into four with thick broken lines. The lower part is three times the size of the upper portion while the vertical divides on the left side appears bigger than the right. At the upper part of the canvas are decorated motifs and patterns.

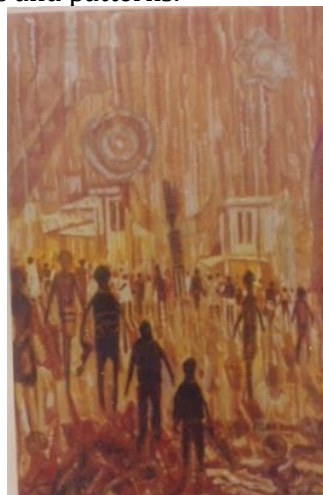


Plate 11: Congress of Violence, (1999), Medium: Mixed Media, Kunle Filani

In *"Congress of Violence"* (Plate 11), Filani exposes peoples' reaction to bad governance in form of protest. These leaders make promises but fail to keep them rather; they display wanton recklessness and carelessness by wasting public funds on frivolities. *"Congress of Violence"* arises from miss-rule which results in the demeaning of the majority of the populace and their subjection to ridicule, hunger and starvation in the land of plenty. Filani uses his art to express the given realities in the period of general depression with the intention that the heart of the heartless powers will one day be touched to the vantage of the down-trodden masses. The work

depicts the reactions by the masses that are unsatisfied with the situation of things and having pushed to the wall, had to react in violence. Often, what result from "*Congress of Violence*" has always left the marks of wanton destruction of lives and property, arising from the lack of professionalism on the part of the security agencies in managing crisis.

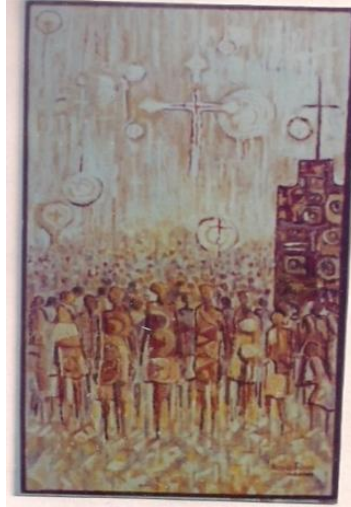


Plate 12: After the Service, (2001), Medium: Acrylic, Kunle Filani

Nigerians are highly religious people; it is common knowledge on Sundays that worshippers would converge in the church. In "*After the Service*" (Plate 12), Filani depicts what it always looks like when church closes. The essence of church attendance is conversion which is expected to result in the consciousness of change of attitude. Typically, where that is lacking, church going becomes sensual, lacking substance. On the way to church, people are often saintly and gorgeously dressed with angelic look nevertheless, after the service, the "old self" put aside on the way to the service returns. As such, it can be summed up that pretext pervades the attitude of most people. Again, different subjects ranging from the message, testimonies, fashion in vogue, cars bought, houses built, to politics, economies are among issues regularly discussed after service. Sometimes, friends are made across sexes, and age; at other times, business deals may also be struck. Kunle depicts the crowd of people that are gathered making their way home, particularly when the church is a cathedral as indicated in the painting.



Plate 13: Thou Shall Not, (1996), Medium: Mixed Media, Kunle Filani

Moses, one of the major patriarchs of Jewish descent, received the Ten Commandments given by God to guide the affairs of Israelites and humanity at large. Filani in "*Thou Shall Not*" (Plate 13) presents a narrative that when adhered to will lead to peaceful co-existence among the people. The Bible says, "Where there is no law, there is no sin". In that circumstance, a lawless society will always be in chaos and pandemonium. Even with the laws, those who made it are sometimes the first to break it. Jesus in the New Testament sums the Ten Commandments into two: love for God; and love for our neighbors (Matthew 22:36). Jesus calls it the first and greatest commandment. A nation where love flows from the leadership to the led, and among all, unity and progress will be inevitably guaranteed. The canvass that holds the texts on which

the Ten Commandments is inscribed white gives impression of paper pasted on a canvass and slanted at the left edge of another canvass and attached to Aso-Oke fabric designed pattern. This allows for an ample space for the eyes to play around thereby creating the illusion the canvass as fabric.

Conclusion

This study reveals that motifs, signs, symbols and patterns which served as indigenous means of communication among the Yoruba are being adopted in paintings not only as mere stimulations on specially treated canvasses but to document and record treasured symbols of cultural values as connections with contemporary times for a better understanding of the future. Filani is inspired by the Yoruba semiotics and aesthetics as entrenched in her art and crafts. He employed form, structure and content as located within the African art philosophy.

Filani's scenes, themes and stylistic tendencies, combine discernable and abstract forms, he presents humanistic content in abstract forms interpretable by his audience. He makes visual comments on a wide range of events covering the socio-cultural, economic and political situations of the people in order to bring about a change. Filani's images are metamorphic, his figural, abstract and background treatment are rhythmically connected to forms, and notes in the manner that it rhymes the Yoruba iconology. "Ogbonologbon ni je a peagba ni were"-meaning that shared experience will save elders being labeled as lunatics.

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