

## Traffic Chaos and Lock jam on Lagos Roads: Visual Expression of Select Lagos-Based Artists

**Kolade Ayeyemi**

Department of Fine and Applied Arts  
Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Phone No: 08038255200,  
E-mail: moklad01@yahoo.com,

**Opadosu. J.O**

Department of Fine and Applied Arts  
Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Lagos, Nigeria.  
Phone No: 08033599986:  
E-mail: iyimoopa@yahoo.com

Corresponding Author : **Kolade Ayeyemi ( [moklad01@yahoo.com](mailto:moklad01@yahoo.com) )**

### ABSTRACT

Existing studies on transportation system of Lagos over time focused on the visual account of travellers and slogans printed on cars, buses and trucks particularly commercial vehicles. But little attention has been paid to the diverse ways transportation disorder such as, chaos and lock jam are represented in artistic works of Lagos-based visual artists. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the representation of traffic chaos in the paintings of Festus Adeyemi, Bolaji Ogunwo, Ishola Matthew and Dolapo Ogunmusi who are contemporary artists in the city of Lagos, with a view to offering an interpretive schema on the works of the selected artists. Douglas Kiel and Euel Elliott theory of chaos, which opined that instability and disorder were essential to the evolution of complexity in the universe was adopted as framework. Sixteen paintings were purposely selected as samples. Qualitative data were obtained through interviews of the four artists whose works were selected. Painting works of the selected artists and the interviews were subjected to narrative descriptions. The artists actualised the complication in urban Lagos transportation, and gave visual expression to the impatience of drivers and other road users, which resulted in traffic gridlocks. Colour and other artistic elements guided by art principles accurately projected the works and made them lexical. Transportation chaos on the streets of Lagos and how the artists have generated the creative ideas represent instability and disorderliness in the Lagos public space made up this work

**Keywords** Visual artist, Lagos, Painting, Transportation, Chaos, Traffic gridlock

**Copyright** Provided that the author(s) and the source are credited, noncommercial use of the article is allowed, including printing and distribution.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.36349/olijhe.2024.v01i02.019>

### AUTHOR'S BIO



**OPADOSU, James Omoniyi**, is a Principal Lecturer at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Lagos where he teaches Visual Arts and Art History. He is currently running his Doctorate in Art History at the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Nigeria. His research interest is in the beaded crown and other insignia of the office of Yoruba Oba (King). His works have been published in both local and international academic journals. Opadosu is a member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) and has participated in many art exhibitions.



**AYEYEMI, Kolade**, is a Principal Lecturer at department of Fine and Applied Arts Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka, Lagos where he teaches Visual arts/Art History. He is a PhD student of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interest focuses on how Lagos-Based Visual Artists represent and present transportation chaos and disorder on Lagos streets and waterways as a unique approach to the historical documentation of Lagos metropolis which has been dominated by other literary genres. Ayeyemi is an African indigenous author that uses his writings to propagate the significance of African arts to the African people as against the wrong notions. His works have been published in local and international journals. He is also a practicing artist and a committed member of Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) who had participated in many art exhibitions within and outside Nigeria.

**INTRODUCTION:** Visual art is symbolic and interpretation of human life and this makes it meaningful and applicable in the political, social economic, scientific and intellectual background that influences the purely historic events. Style which is the way art work looks, showcases the creative handwriting of the artist with his choice of materials, iconography as the subject matter and symbolism visually portrays the meaning of art while, historical content projects the environment. The way artist rendered and executed his works has a lot to do with the artist, his environment and his background culture. Artist in his or her creative enclave captures the society's historical events for better advancement. Visual art in history has remained one of the elements of recording human activities. The creative efforts of the early men pioneered the subsequent human innovations. In contemporary time, visual art complements human endeavours with magnificent outputs of sustainability (Egonwa. 1991, Bewaji. 2003, Eyo, 1990, Adepegba, 1995, Campbell. 2008)

Visual art has been in the business of documenting history, creating historical consciousness, indicating self-awareness and exposing experiential factors in development. Transportation as act of moving passengers, goods and services from one location to another has been recorded by artists of divergent centuries. The cave painting of the earlier period expressively showcased the movement of human and animals on the cave walls. (Mbiti. 1992, Brain. 1980, Adepegba, 2002, Fleming. 1974, Egonwa. 2011, Alana, 2004). The contemporary artists explicitly express visually the transportation scenes most especially in urban city like Lagos where transportation remains hectic and clumsy most time. In its real sense, cosmopolitan nature of Lagos makes its transportation system chaotic. This allows the city to receive generous attention from social historians and other scholarly genres. However, little or no

studies in visual anthropology have focused on the way chaos in urban Lagos transportation is depicted in paintings. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the stylistic representation of chaos in the paintings of Festus Adeyemi, Bolaji Ogunwo, Ishola Matthew and Dolapo Ogunnusi who are contemporary artists in Lagos. This work stands with a view to offering an interpretive schema on the works of the selected artists. The aim is to investigate how the artists, working on the painting of chaos in Lagos transportation culture, visually present and represent the transportation system to the public, and the concept(s) of chaos they develop as a value in their works. Lagos as the study area remains a commercial centre of Nigeria with an increase population of people that believe living in Lagos will boost their economic prowess, makes the city a centre of attraction for sustainable human and infrastructural development. The theoretical framework for this dissertation rest on the theory of chaos, advanced by Kiel and Elliott (1996). It opines that instability and disorder are essential to the evolution of complexity in the universe. Since chaos is state of utter confusion and total lack of organization, it is pertinent to consider the way and manner man reacts to challenges at every stage of life. Man sees life as the epitome of existence that goes beyond the physical but deeply rooted in nature and subsequent occurrences. Human behaviour signifies actions and inactions that relay how man responds to the effect of chaos at any point in time. Fundamentally, human behaviour is as nonlinear as are the physical and natural behaviour of the rest of the Universe Kiel and Elliott (1996) maintain that chaos belongs to the mythological heritage of many different ancient cultures, almost as a cultural universal whereas, on the other hand, it refers to a very particular research programme in the study of the temporary evolution of nonlinear determination system. Activities of man give credence to the way man relates socially and culturally to their environment. In the public space Kiel and Elliott see man as the instrument and major object that makes things happen. Man's attitude and characteristic tendency fashion out ultimately the

outcome of chaos that ravages the firmament of the terrestrial space where man gets involved easily. The movement of man in his domesticated environ witnesses direct and indirect obstructions and this leads to the careful approach envisaged whenever man passes through the struggle of life. In the literary interpretation of chaos theory, man's movement within physical space most especially in a congested abode, creates confusion. This is the area at which the theory of Kiel and Elliott becomes very much relevant. The sixteen paintings of these selected artists are the depiction of human activities in the city of Lagos that pervaded with daily struggles: Olokada, Keke Marwa, The New Order, and BRT Lane by Festus Adeyemi (Plates. 2-5), Old Oshodi, After the Rain, Rail line Market, and At the River Side by Bolaji Ogunowo (Plates. 6-9), Idumota, Morning Rush, A Place I use to Know (I), and A Place I use to Know (II) by Ishola Matthew (Plates. 10-13), Closing Time at Idumota, Before the Closing Hour, Busy Bus Stop, and Rush Hour in Lagos Island by Dolapo Ogunnusi (Plates. 14-17) were purposively sampled in 2017. Qualitative data were obtained through interviews of the four artists whose works were selected. Painting works of the selected artists and the interviews were subjected to narrative descriptions. Festus Adeyemi, Bolaji Ogunwo, Ishola Matthew and Dolapo Ogunnusi are the purposely selected artists for this study. Festus Adeyemi is a Chief Lecturer at Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka. He had participated in various art exhibitions with other educative art programmes in Nigeria and abroad. His recent works of art advocate the use of waste products as alternative for artistic medium. Bolaji Ogunwo, the second artist on the list, is also, a lecturer in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos. Akoka. His creative and exceptional method of painting using palette knife, instead of brush, makes him a distinct professional in the field. Most of his painting works represent living a life in Lagos city.

Matthew Ishola, the third painter, is another art educator based in Lagos. He is a secondary school art teacher and school administrator (Principal) with record of over fifty paintings on Lagos streets. His paintings mostly capture the day-to-day activities of Lagos people, especially those struggling to board commercial vehicles at several busy points in the city. The manner in which he represents commuters' experiences in, his works makes them look like real photo picture. Dolapo Ogunnusi is the fourth painter whose work was examined. He is a civil servant. His painting experience extends beyond mere representation to rendering the mood and the climatic condition of the environment in what he presents and represents. He carries his work beyond the surface of the canvas by using related colours to arouse the interest of the patrons.

The artists' paintings visually portray the complication in urban Lagos transportation, and gave expression to the impatience of drivers and other road users, which resulted in traffic gridlocks. Colour and other artistic elements guided by art principles accurately projected the works and made them lexical. (Bewaji, 2003, Folaranmi, 2004). Through unstable forms and patterns, all the paintings with the exception of New Order and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Lane depicted the disorder and confusion that pervaded the urban transportation system. Olokada and Keke Marwa, in particular, represented a further complication that arose from an attempt to solve a problem. The theme of periodicity of chaos was elaborated in Closing Time at Idumota and Rush Hour in Lagos Island, where overlapping yellow buses conveyed the vivid image of gridlock. Representation of crowded commuters, realised in heavy painting strokes in Idumota and A Place I Used to Known (1) described not just the population challenges in Lagos but also the urban decline that had resulted from transportation pressure. The New Order and BRT Lane, which stood in contrast to the disorderliness communicated in the other paintings, represented efforts at addressing transportation challenges of Lagos and attested to the evolution of the transportation sector. The paintings captured the

individual experiences of the selected artists and were expressive illustrations of their daily encounters with the traffic situations in Lagos. Transportation chaos as captured in the paintings of Festus Adeyemi, Bolaji Ogunwo, Ishola Matthew and Dolapo Ogunnusi were stylistic piece embedded with artistic impressions of reality. Transportation chaos on the streets of Lagos, the values, which artists have generated represent instability and disorderliness in the public space.

### **The Overview of Chaotic Traffic in the Paintings of Selected Artists**

The main objective of this work is the visual presentation and representation of the transportation chaos on the streets of Lagos by Lagos-based visual artists. Therefore, the following subheadings: congestion on the road, overcrowded bus stops, impatience and struggling for commuters and unexpected hold up and traffic jam are the ways in which the objective has been illustrated and analyzed in a descriptive order.

#### **CONGESTION ON THE ROAD**

Buses and road users are depicted by all the artists as struggling within and between themselves to create ways into a park or out of a park. The struggle makes movement uneasy for commuters on the Lagos streets. In Adeyemi's painting titled "Keke marwa" (Fig. 3) the tricycles are moving toward the same direction. In another painting by the same artist, there is a kind of confusion in spite of the new arrangement of the BRT new transportation system. Example is the long queue expressively portrayed by Adeyemi in the work tagged "The new order" (Fig. 4) Ogunwo's painting reflects the congestion on Lagos roads. In the work titled, "After the rain" (Fig.7) he paints a typical scene on Lagos Street characterized by selling and buying activities. The road in this particular painting is filled to the brim by the Lagos big Yellow buses and the crowd of Lagosians struggling to

get out of the Lagos hectic traffic of buses moving side by side with fear of being pulled down. His work titled "Old Oshodi" (Fig. 6) is another peculiar example of transportation congestion on Lagos streets. It showcases the complete disorderliness on Lagos roads.

The buses and the commuters are choked to the extent that there is no space between them than to move side by side at the centre of the road as is the case at old Oshodi. Carrying more than the required passengers is part of the confusion created by Lagos transportation chaos. This causes most of the buses to start moving erratically on the busy road in order to make sure that they get more commuters faster than other buses. In the works of Ishola, particularly in the painting titled "Idumota" (Fig. 10) we can see the clumsy situation of the busy Lagos Island in the evening time as people rush to parks or into the buses trying to escape the traffic congestion. The heavy congestion is in the big and small yellow buses moving without control along the queue, while human traffic is perpetually on both sides of these moving vehicles. In some cases, the commuters are sandwiched within the available space between the buses. Chaos is equally evident in "A place I use to know I and II" (Fig. 12 and 13) because the commuters find pleasure in walking on the main road and struggling with buses.

The congestion on the Lagos road is also noticed in the paintings produced by Ogunnusi. In the work titled "Closing time at Idumota" (Fig. 14) there is a typical expression of the chaotic situation being experienced on daily bases on the Lagos streets. This particular work shows Molue buses coming out of the clumsy street of Idumota market. The narrow road contributed to the chaotic environment created by the buses and the commuters. The buildings along the road, at both sides, make the space a bit narrower. So commuters have to move calculative beside the buses in order to negotiate the narrow spaces often left and get to their destination on time. And in another works titled "Rush hour at Idumota" (Fig. 17) there is huge crowd of commuters at a busy bus stop in the Island. This bus stop remains one of the bus stops able to accommodate huge concentration, of people, though there is rowdiness on the spot.

### **(ii) OVERCROWDED BUS STOPS**

In the paintings by Adeyemi, commuters largely congregate at bus stops, in spite of the fact that new transportation systems have been introduced by the Lagos government. The newly introduced BRT buses in (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) still portray the huge number of commuters queuing to get buses to their destination. In Old Oshodi, (Fig. 6) by Ogunwo, the crowded nature of the then Oshodi Lagos was created by presence of high numbers of pedestrians on the road that are involved in different activities ranging from selling, buying and roaming. The commercial activities contributed greatly to the situation where motorists and the commuters need to struggle to have their ways, as in (Fig. 6, 7 and 8). Ishola, like the other artists, showcases the huge concentration of Lagos citizens at every bus stop. In his works, such as: "Idumota" (Fig. 10) "Morning rush" (Fig. 11) "A place I use to know" (Fig. 12 and 13) The consciousness of overcrowding evident here is that of common scenario where people, in all the paintings, stay put at certain point without movement, due to the chaotic situation.

Showcasing many yellow buses in the midst of an overcrowded at the middle of the road, people are seeing around waiting and struggling to enter moving buses with the hope of getting to their destination. In one of the works, which Ishola titled "Idumota" (Fig. 10) the crowd covered an area of about five hundred metres, stretching from the far north to the down south of the painting. Ogunnnusi's, titled "Busy bus stop" (Fig. 16) in a similar manner highlights presence of a crowd at every bus stop within the Lagos metropolis.

### **iii) IMPATIENCE AND STRUGGLING FOR COMMUTERS**

Lagos transporters are always in haste; hence they have the tendency to drive recklessly and

thereby make driving difficult and chaotic for themselves. The drivers and conductors are into a habit of rushing, because they seek commuters' patronage; and usually blocking the passage of other road users, in other to access passengers. Often, this driving pattern causes accidents and commotions, at parks or on the road and most time creates long traffic jams and delay. One find in Adeyemi's (Fig. 4 and 5) works this palpable tension and in (Fig. 2 and 3) and an insight into Okada riders and Marwa on Lagos streets. The drivers' impatience and struggles are noticeable. Impatience of Okada riders makes them to be crossing each other on the lanes while, the Marwa vehicles move within the narrow spaces left beside the road. This type of impatience is also depicted in Bolaji Ogunwo's paintings.

Impatience on the part of motorists on the Lagos roads has caused a lot of damage to vehicles. Accident and other avoidable situations have been created. The works produced by Ogunwo the "Old Oshodi" (Fig. 6) and "After the rain" (Fig. 7) are two paintings representing hectic and difficult situation of Lagos transportation system. This artist makes the painting surfaces look heavy and more saturated with thick colours. In most of the paintings of Ishola Mathew, the driving pattern takes another dimension, with the way the drivers handle the steering and put their vehicles on irregular motion causing hold ups. This is more obvious in two of his paintings titled "A place I use to know 1 and II" (Fig. 12 and 13). The paintings, titled "Before the closing hour" and "Busy bus stop" (Fig. 15 and 16) is the two works of Ogunnnusi that depict the impatience of the Lagos drivers when picking commuters. These works show the irregular driving situation where the yellow Danfo buses are moving uncontrollably at bus stops without caution.

### **iv) UNEXPECTED HOLD UP AND TRAFFIC JAM**

Outside the paintings produced by Adeyemi, paintings of the other artists depict typical situation of Lagos busy road, and the unexpected hold ups. The huge concentration of the yellow buses on the main road, without movement for many minutes or

hours causes unimaginable hold up and long jams. With the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) buses, as depicted by Adeyemi, there is commotion when the buses are queuing up at the bus stops and commuters are rushing in without ceasing. In all the works produced by Ogunwo including his work titled “River side” (Fig. 9), when he depicts canoes on the river, he captures large concentration of vehicles causing long jams on the road. In other paintings selected for our analysis, “Old Oshodi” (Fig. 6), “After the rain” (Fig. 7), and

“Rail line market” (Fig. 8), vehicles of various categories, especially the yellow buses, create huge traffic jam. The same scenario is evident in the four selected works of Ishola. His paintings show large concentrations of yellow buses on the main roads sandwiched with commuters, which create hold up on the Lagos main roads. In the works of Ogunnusi, there is huge crowd of commuters at every bus stop on large open space. Though, the available space does look less problematic, the situation in and around the bus stops is hectic and clumsy for people's movement at busy hours of the day.

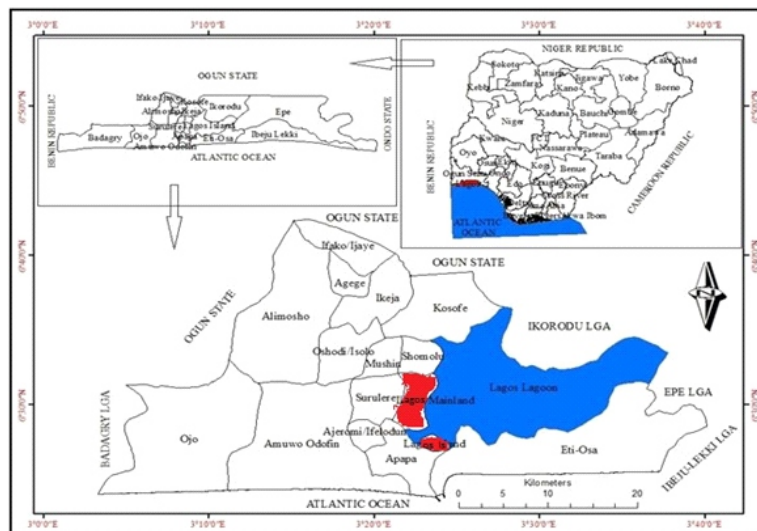


Fig. 1. The linear sketch map of Lagos state.

Source: Ministry of Land and Housing, Lagos State Secretariat (2017)



Fig. 2

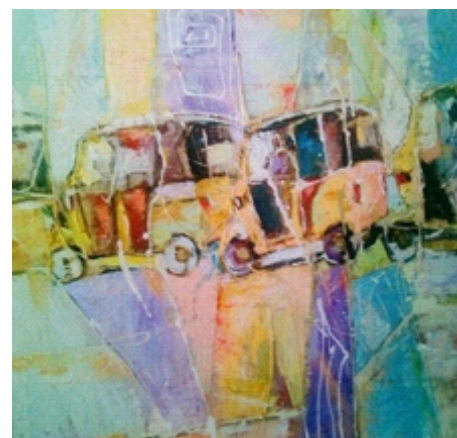


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig.10



Fig. 11



Fig.12



Fig. 13



Fig.14



Fig.15



Fig.16

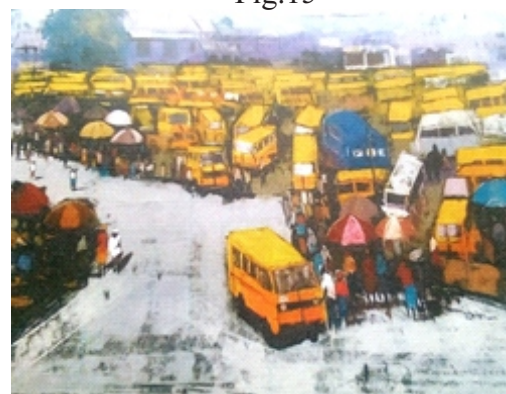


Fig.17

(Source of the Pictures in the Plates: Kolade Ayeyemi, Field work (May, 2017))

## Values in the Documentation of Lagos Transportation Chaos

Documentation of great events across the globe by artists has been a great contribution to the cultural heritage of the world. From time immemorial, artists worked to complement the knowledge of man by persistently recording history through their creative endeavours for appreciation and continued advancement of human culture. present artists have been able to replicate the efforts of the African “ancient” artists with a view to documenting present realities. Adaptation and adoption of the art works produced by ancient artists paved way for the new art of the present generation. In terms of content and context the new artists are consciously using their indigenous ideas coupled with their latest experiences to project and promote the African heritage. This valuable ideal has been technically transferred to the artists of today and also complemented the efforts of recreating the environment to meet people present needs. The set of artists selected for this work appears to have been able to go a step further with the documentation of events and activities in the streets of Lagos, most especially in the area of transportation. The development of Lagos transportation system from the era of using lorry as a means of transportation, to the era of *Molue* and *Danfo* yellow buses today has been one of remarkable changes in Lagos. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is well organized than anything that was used as transportation in Lagos. Yet, one can still see the manner the artists are able to depict chaos on the Lagos streets through them and other vehicles to communicate or disseminate information. Thus, making the confusion created by reckless drivers, conductors and impatient commuters become an issue in writing the history of the state.

The artists' paintings are sold out to the public from private apartments transformed into public space as viewing centres. The creative artists in the city execute works that reflect chaotic scenes, that enter the memory and sense

of history. Paintings executed by these artists become not just for old Oshodi but also for the modern Oshodi. In this way, they connect to people, most especially the art lovers, among whom are the patrons that buy these arts, and develop social relations. In this wise, some of them become friends and art companions for life. The strong message is that the transportation system remains a good example of a typical African environment that gives room for people of diverse culture and religion to live and interact freely without cause for misunderstanding.

Despite the fact that, the artists focus on traffic chaos and gridlocks, each of them creates his art in a way peculiar to objectifying personal qualities; most especially, in the use of art materials coupled with understanding of art principles. The Lagos art lovers and art patrons can, with deep reflection and understanding of meaning identify and recognize each artist style of painting and together with the patrons and the clients can enter into the project societal imagination and maintain the creative memories of all Lagosians (Folaranmi, 2005). Base on the above, transportation chaos, on Lagos roads, and the values generated through artistic documentation, paintings of these artists, represent instability and disorderliness in the urban public space.

## Conclusion

Transportation chaos in the streets of Lagos is symbolic representation of Lagos hectic situation that pervades the city and makes people to behave irrationally as everybody is on the move to meet targets. Thereby, the drivers and the commuters embed in the struggle to attain their level of performance as shareholders in Lagos transportation system. Poor Lagos roads and increase in the population of the city without check remain very important factors. The roads in the Lagos metropolis apart from the few ones are not too conducive enough for the kind of traffic experience on the roads. People from all over the country considered

Lagos as city of opportunities where things are possible and people move in regularly to attain their level of accomplishment. After all, this is causing congestion that has great impact on the Lagos city plan (Aniakor,2003 Apata, 2015) And the effect is greatly felt on the movement of Lagosians who depend on the Lagos poor transportation system.

In most of the paintings of the selected artists, there are related experiences to the struggle on the part of the drivers and the Lagos commuters who consciously partake in the Lagos life of rushing to meet target at all time and thereby create chaos. On the paintings, it becomes obvious that the artists one way or the other experience what other people in the streets of Lagos are passing through daily. They boarded popular Lagos commercial vehicles and experienced the same thing with the common Lagos people. Through these experiences, it was deduced that, the chaotic transportation experience in the streets of Lagos is created by everybody including private vehicle owners who have no other route than the common route that belong to everybody. These are the few experiences from the fieldwork that the study has identified which actually defined the values generated.

## REFERENCES

- Abiodun, R. (2014) *Yoruba Art and Languages: Seeking the African Art*. Massachusetts.
- Abiodun, R, Drewal, J, Pemberton, J (1991) *Yoruba Art and Aesthetics*. Zurich. ZSD Zurichese Druckerel Stafa.
- Adepegba, C. (1995) *Nigeria Art Its Traditions and Modern Tendencies*. Ibadan. Jodad Publishers. Ltd. P.24
- Adepegba, C. (2002) *African Art Forms Across "Tribe" and Times*. Ibadan. University of Ibadan Press
- Alana, O., (2004) *Belief in Divinities, and Ancestors*; in *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*. Eritrea. African World Press. Inc. P.71
- Aniakor, C (2003) *Modern History of Visual Arts in Southern Nigeria*. Ibadan. IFRA Publishers.
- Apata, D. (2015) *Strengths of the Yoruba Nation Unity of Direction and Purpose*. The Sunday Tribune of 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2015. No. 2. P.54.
- Atanda, A (2017) *The collection of Works of J. A Atanda* edited by Toyin Falola, Texas Pan-African University Press. P. 105
- Bascom, W (1973) *African Art. A cultural perspective*. New York, www.norton and company.
- Bewaji, A (2003) *Beauty and culture: Perspectives in Black Aesthetics- An Introduction to African and African diaspora philosophy of Arts*. Ibadan: Kenbim Press Ltd.
- Bodunrin, A. (2013) *Wednesday Night at a Gentleman's Club*. City Voice Newspaper of November, 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013: 17. Copyright @ 2015 Globe Media LTD. Detailed travel guide to Lagos
- Campbell, B. (2008) *Painting for the Gods Art and Aesthetics of Yoruba Religious Murals*. Eritrea, Saverance Publishing Services. P. 16
- Egonwa, O (1973) *African Art. A Contemporary source Book*. Benin: Osasu Publishers: P. 27.
- Egonwa, O. (2011) *Nigeria Art Introductory note*; Abraka, Gossy Publishers. P. 47.
- Eyo, E (1990) *Two thousand years of African art*. London: Ethnographical, London: Association with National Commission for museums and monuments.

Fleming, W (1973) *Arts and Ideas New and Brief Edition*. New York Holt: Rineh Publishers: 1.

Folaranmi, S. (2005) *The challenges and the development of Styles in Nigeria Art in Issues And challenges of creativity in contemporary Nigeria Art*. Journal of Culture and Creative Art Forum Vol. 2(1): 64

Folarin, A (2004) *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture*. Eritria. African world press: 353

Kiel, D and Elliott, E (1996) *An Arbor: University of Michigan Press*, 1996. 34 ap. Published Online by Cambridge University Press: 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2014.