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## **Oil: Visual Metaphors in Paintings of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria**

**Ubogu, Nics O., PhD**

Department of Fine Arts and Design

Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt.

E-mail: [nubogu@yahoo.com](mailto:nubogu@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

The discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in the Niger Delta of Nigeria in 1956, served as a doorway to the discovery of several oil wells in Port Harcourt. Unfortunately, oil exploration activities have led to major changes in the historical, political and socio-economic dynamics of the area. Inevitably, these changes have resulted in social transformations which have inspired artists to produce artistic works - visual images that tell the stories of oil communities and people of Port Harcourt. These stories revolve around environmental degradation, conflict and the struggle for socio-political and economic development. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to explore the narrative metaphors which unfold within selected paintings that reveal the impact of oil exploration activities on Port Harcourt and its people, and the significance of these paintings in modern Nigerian art.

**Key Words:** Oil, Port Harcourt, environmental degradation, conflict, painting

### **Introduction**

Historically, Port Harcourt came into existence in 1912 by the pronouncement of Sir Lord Frederick Lugard, Governor of the Northern and Southern Protectorate. The name was derived from the Port that was built and named Port Harcourt in August 30, 1913, in honour of the then Secretary of State for the colonies, Lewis Vernon Harcourt.

The Port Harcourt port has a unique socio-economic and cultural history. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the slave trade was no longer yielding income because of the worldwide abolition of slavery. This led to the 'Scramble for Africa' which resulted in a more legitimate trade comprising the exchange of goods and services to support European industries and to produce and export goods, among them agricultural products such as palm produce, palm kernels,

timber, rubber, groundnuts, cocoa, coffee, as well as leather and coal for European consumption. The problem of transportation was solved by the government of the colonial administrators by building the seaport and a railway line from Port Harcourt to Aba which was completed in January 1916. According to Briggs and Ndimele, “By the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1916, the first portion of the railway line from Port Harcourt to Aba was opened for passenger and goods traffic and by May of the same year, the first coal train reached Port Harcourt from Udi near Eungu. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1916, the first shipload of coal, in ‘Sir Hugh’, left Port Harcourt for Lagos” (2013, p.79).

Port Harcourt City was planned by the Colonial administrators. In the North West, the Government Reserved Area (GRA), known as European Quarters, was built while the South-Western Zone was reserved for indigenes and visitors that were black people. The city was planned with recreational space which sometimes served as an activity ground. In August 1945, Port Harcourt officially became a township and commercial air transport began in May 1946 (Briggs and Ndimele, 2013, p. 80).

With the development of the city’s socio-economic infrastructure encouraged by the presence of industries and commercial activities, job seekers, business men, market women from various ethnic groups such as the Kalabari, Opobo, Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and from places such as Ahoada, Owerri and Aba, to name a few, settled down in Port Harcourt. Other nationals from Gold Coast (Ghana), Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo and some Asian countries also arrived in Port Harcourt by sea. The city also witnessed the construction of educational institutions and health facilities to cater to the need of the people. By 1950, a telephone exchange was established (Briggs & Ndimele, 2013, p. 87).

#### **Port Harcourt City and the Discovery of Crude Oil from 1956 till Date**

By 1955, Port Harcourt started functioning as a full cosmopolitan and municipal city due to the growth of industries, trade and commercial activities. Coal mining in Udi (Udi hills) near Enugu, as well as agriculture also contributed tremendously to the economy and boosted income earning and, subsequently, the standard of living in Port Harcourt. During this period, artists drew their inspiration and themes from the socio-cultural, economic, and entrepreneurial development and activities of the environment. Many artistic works during this period were naturalistic and realistic in nature, focusing on representations of people, places and events of daily life.

A strong shift in the Nigerian economy occurred due to the discovery of crude oil, nicknamed ‘black gold’ in the village of Oloibiri in May 1956 by Shell D’Arcy Company now known as Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). Oloibiri is a community about 150 Kilometres from Port Harcourt, in present day Bayelsa State. The first oil exported through the Port Harcourt port in commercial quantity by Shell D’rcy was in 1958. Crude oil exploration became a blessing to the Nigerian economy but, unfortunately, oil exploration activities have led to major changes in the historical, socio-economic and political dynamics of the area. Between 1957 and 1960, more oil wells were discovered in various communities within Port Harcourt and its environs and, until the creation of Bayelsa State in 1996, Oloibiri was part of Rivers State with Port Harcourt as the state capital.

By 1967, crude oil exploration was on-going in most communities in Port Harcourt in commercial quantities and the oil boom became a doorway to a lot of capital development in

Port Harcourt City and its environs. The Nigerian Civil War occurred between 1967 and 1970 and led to the destruction of many facilities in the state. However, when the state was liberated on May 19, 1968, it became "... possible for Lieutenant Commander A. P. Diете-Spiff, its first military Governor, to give due attention to issues of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction" (Tamuno, 2013, p. 33).

From 2007 to 2013, there was a demolition of the shanty towns at the waterfronts in Diobu and a new road was created by Chief Rufus Ada George, from Agip through Wimpey to the NTA Road. A sand-fill project was also initiated to create a new town at Borokiri. Governor Rotimi Amaechi also dualized Rumuola Road in 2009. Other roads were also built within the Diobu community and the Eagle Island Community also enjoyed a facelift. A new sport stadium was built in honour of Chief Adokiye Amiesimaka in "the Greater Port Harcourt City Master Plan" which also harboured the new site of the Rivers State University of Science and Technology and a golf course area directly opposite the International Airport Hotel (Cookey- Gam, 2013, p. 171). Governor Amaechi also built modern primary and secondary schools in the two local Government areas in Port Harcourt, several health centres and hospitals within the city, as well as the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital. By 2015, Governor Nyesom Wike had dualised roads along the Trans Amadi Industrial hub, through Woji community, with bridges to the Elelewo community. He also resurfaced the Aba Express Road, built a Freedom Park along Aba Road and reconstructed and surfaced the Choba-Airport dual carriage road with functional street lights.

Currently, Port Harcourt can boast of an international airport, two refineries, a petrochemical industry, a liquefied natural gas plant, a fertilizer company, notable companies such as Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Nigerian Natural Liquefied Gas (NNLG), several international firms and industries at the Trans Amadi Industrial hub, modern shopping centres and markets, as well as government ministries and parastatals. In the educational sector, there are three universities - University of Port Harcourt, University of Science and Technology and Ignatius Ajuru University. Today, the vision and mission of further development embraces the building of what Cookey-Gam (2008) describes as "...a well-planned City through the implementation and enforcement of policies that will ensure the provision of first-rate infrastructure and delivery of quality services to enhance the standard of living and well-being of the people" (cited in Cookey-Gam, 2013, p. 175).

The socio-economic and political developments in Port Harcourt since the discovery of crude oil in 1956 have motivated many artists within the environment to shift their focus to themes that explore the visual metaphors of crude oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This paper will only focus on artistic visual metaphors after the discovery of crude oil from 1956 to date.

### **The Artist and Visual Metaphors**

An artist is a person who has the ability to create visual images with materials that can be seen through the practicing and demonstrating of artistic works. Painters, sculptors and photographers are artists whose works have values and fulfill practical roles in their creative works. Contemporary artists serve many functions - they experience forms and crystallize their thinking into form, design, inventions and ideas - art. Art is, therefore, the visual expression of an idea of high value by the artist through his skill or techniques and materials such as oil

colours, water colours, pastel, and acrylic. The combination of two different materials such as oil and water colours in an artistic work is regarded as mixed media. Art can also be defined as the expression of individual creative skill, techniques and imagination, rendered in visual forms such as painting and sculpture that possess forms, lines, shapes, value, texture and colour, presented with feelings that can be appreciated aesthetically.

Artists contribute a lot to the development of society. Being very sensitive, artists easily absorb the atmosphere of their environment and feel very strongly about the things happening around them which they express through their artistic works. Thus, one of the significant roles of the artist is to record and commemorate events that capture their attention and emotions by creating images of them that enable us to remember them long after they slip into the past.

Being very creative and experimental, artists, many of them painters, are keen to project themes, especially on subject matters relating to their environments. According to Betts (1993), these painters “explore the material further to condense, intensify, organize and transform it with the idea of discovering its full potential as a painting” (p. 25). Many of these works manifest in various forms of paintings, such as landscape paintings, which serve as visual metaphors of the narratives revolving around oil exploration and exploitation and their effects on Port Harcourt and its environs.

Petrenko and Korotchenko (2012) define metaphor as “a type of trope, a transmission of the properties of one object (or phenomenon or aspect of life) to another because of their similarity in any aspect or by contrast...The construction of a metaphor is supposed to unite dissimilar images, creating poetic expressiveness” (pp. 535; 537). They further explained:

As an element of art language, the artistic image in each work of art is unique. The artistic symbol is multidimensional: it arouses various feelings and not just serenity. It can give a feeling of cool detachment and sadness, and it can create a sensation of time dilation or other feelings; the symbol can correlate the viewer’s state with his or her thinking. Complex emotional responses of the viewer to a work of art are the result of the successful use of the means of expression, particularly tropes, which serve to create an artistic image. (p. 534)

The following observation of art by Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) aptly captures its significant role and impact as a visual metaphor:

... one of its primary functions in all cultures around the world has been to tell our human stories, to help us know who we are and how and what we believe. This concept assumes that the aesthetic form at the heart of most artworks is used to effect some kind of communication, and that the artist uses his or her skills in composition and technique to create works that extend beyond themselves to tell us something about the human experience. (xxiii)

Visual metaphors in painting, therefore, lend the work a sense of mystery by giving it new attributes and meanings that are figurative in nature, thereby encouraging the viewer to look beyond what he or she sees on the surface for the real story or message.

### **The Impact of Oil Exploration and Exploitation on the Artist and His Work**

In Port Harcourt metropolis, the last sixty years of crude oil exploration and exploitation have played a major role in the development of visual images that tell the stories of oil communities

and their people within the city and its environs. Many artists within the region have and still draw their inspirations and themes from visual images that emanate from crude oil exploration and exploitation. Many of their visuals revolve around environmental degradation, conflict, conflict resolution, and the struggle for socio-political and economic development.

Many paintings created by artists in Port Harcourt capture images of the oil space and hazards associated with oil exploration such as the pollution of land and water. Other images include representations of personnel and man-made objects created by oil industries. Equipment such as oil rigs, criss-crossing pipelines within the communities and the creeks, and from the industrial areas to the creeks and to various oil platforms are also portrayed. Evidently, many of these installations lead to misfortune and cause irreparable damage to the land and its people. To support this statement Ekpo (2004) asserted:

In communities where oil exploration and production are carried out onshore, deforestation, erosion and destroyed farmlands are the main signposts for this gift of nature. Oil production activities in these communities have polluted creeks and destroyed aquatic life. And when there are spillages, losses could be unquantifiables ... (as cited in Briggs & Ndimele, 2013, p. 101)

The results of these damages are destruction of aquatic life, deforestation, erosion, oil spillages, lack of proper environmental management, the demand for the payment of compensation for destroyed farmland, and the demand for resource control, repairs and cleanup exercises, images which are captured by many artists in their works. Some artists also reflect the blessings associated with oil exploration in their works. From the 1970s till date, Port Harcourt visual artists such as Jubilee Owe, Haig David-West, Diseye Tantua, Donald W. Brown, Nics O. Ubogu and others have, in their paintings, used visual metaphors to depict the oil narrative of Port Harcourt and its environs.

### **Theoretical Framework and Related Artistic Works**

The conceptual frame work adopted for this work is the theory of iconography and iconology by Erwin Panofsky (1920-1933) which involves the interpreting of art through the analysis of its subject matter, symbols, themes and history. Iconography refers to the process of describing an artwork while iconology is the interpretation or search for the meaning of the artwork.

The theory of originality and appropriation by Robert Nelson will also be used to interrogate the artistic visual metaphors used in the works under study. This theory states that the work of art is considered as an original from the first day of the creative process. However, one can appropriate the visual image over and over again and each appropriated painting would be regarded as an original. The artistic images and metaphors that emanate from the paintings in the oil rich region of Port Harcourt city will therefore be analyzed based on these theories.

Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* (Fig. 1) is a good example of a visual metaphor. It is an image of two pocket watches, one metal and one soft, which connotes the flexibility and relativity of time. For Petrenko and Korotchenko, "the image of the metal pocket watch next to the "soft" one suggests that time may move differently: flowing slowly or speeding sharply" (2012, pp. 539-540).



Fig. 1. Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* 1931  
Oil on Canvas, 9 ½ x 13 in.  
Source: Retrieved from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

Another intriguing visual metaphor is Ilya Glazunov's *The Last Leaf* (Fig. 2) which portrays an image of an empty birdcage hanging on a tree with a lone leaf. Beside the tree is an image of a sick man while a bust stand on the window sill. This painting is a visual metaphor for "life vs. death, eternal vs. temporal" (Petrenko & Korotchenko, 2012, p. 540).



Fig. 2. Ilya Glazunov's *The Last Leaf*  
Source: Retrieved from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

Emmanuel Inua's *Hello (Revealing a New Self)* (Fig. 3), which depicts a young Muslim Fulani woman whose face is partially shrouded in a veil of jute sack cloth, is a visual metaphor for a woman's self-discovery through consciousness-raising, self-realization and individual growth (Ubogu & Nutsukpo, 2014, p. 26).



Fig. 3. Hello (Revealing a New Self), 2009  
Oil on Mixed Media, 61 cm x 91.5

Source: Offoedu-Okeke, O. *Artists of Nigeria*. Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2012.

Also, Haig David-West's *Protect Our Culture* (Fig. 4), depicts an image of two black and open hands carrying a painting with symbols and motifs of the African culture which represents unity or oneness (Chukueggu, 1998, pp. 126-127).



Fig. 4. Haig David-West's *Protect Our Culture*

Source: *The nucleus: Maiden catalogue of works in Nigeria's national gallery of modern art*, 1981

These works serve as true and meaningful examples of visual metaphors with narratives that transcend the images the viewer sees, such as those of the Port Harcourt and the Niger Delta.

### **Visual Metaphors in Paintings on Port Harcourt and its Environs**

Many artists, among them Bruce Onobrakpeya, Diseye Tantua, Dodd N. Brown, Nics O. Ubogu, Etido Effiong Inyang, Iche-Okoro Aduche, and Kingsley Gomka, have used their artistic works to tell the crude oil narratives of the Niger Delta, through the significant use of visual metaphors. This paper will therefore highlight selected works of these artists with a view to revealing how effectively their paintings have depicted the issues related to oil exploration in the region.

### Bruce Onobrakeya

Bruce Onobrakeya (b.1932) is probably Nigeria's foremost contemporary artist. A living legend, he has attracted the attention of many scholars, critics and historians during the sixty years of his practice as an artist. The high point of his career occurred in 1979 when he exhibited in Toronto, Canada. During the exhibition, he was recognized as the "Best of Africa." Onobrakeya hails from Agbara-Otor, Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. He attended Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaira (now Ahmadu Bello University) from 1958 to 1962. He founded the Harmattan Workshop series in March, 1998. His recent works are collections of works titled *Jewels of Nomadic Images* and *Totems of the Delta*.

Onobrakeya has continued to explore the depths of his creativity, never relenting on generating visual metaphors that are inspired by happenings around him (Ubogu, 2011, p. 1). The artist created two artworks titled *Statue of Freedom (Ogoni Nine)* (Fig. 5, 2002; water colour study) and *Martyrdom of the Ogoni Nine* (Fig. 6, 2007; acrylic on triptilinen canvas).



Fig. 5. Statue of Freedom (Ogoni Nine) (2002)  
Watercolor Study (118x83cm)  
Artist: Bruce Onobrakeya  
Source: *Onobrakeya: masks of the flaming arrows*, D. Jegede (Ed.). 5 Continents Editions, 2014.

Fig. 6. Martyrdom of the Ogoni Nine 2007  
Acrylic on triptilinen canvas(229x159.5cm)  
Artist: Bruce Onobrakeya

These visual images of the 'Ogoni Nine' are historical metaphors that capture issues relating to oil explorations within the Niger Delta region of Ogoni Land that resulted in the death sentence passed on Kenule Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni indigenes: Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuine, Saturday Dobe, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levera and Daniel Gbooko on October 31, 1995, by a Federal Military tribunal. The trial was referred to as a kangaroo Court under the leadership of a military junta, General Sani Abacha, former Military Head of State of Nigeria (1993-98).

Ken Saro-Wiwa, as he was popularly known, and his kinsmen were pronounced guilty on what looked like a framed charge of murdering some Ogoni fellow indigenes. They were condemned to death by hanging on November 10, 1995 by a military court. However, the judgment was subject to appeal. Before their appeals could be heard, they were executed by hanging. One of the issues raised by the Movement for Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), a group led by Saro-Wiwa, was the need for the environmental cleanup of Ogoni Land. Thus, they prevented



Anglo-Dutch Shell Petroleum Company (now SPDC) from further exploration of numerous oil wells in the region until their demands were met. Secondly, Ken Saro-Wiwa exposed to the world the plight of the ravaged and degraded Niger Delta due to oil spillages and pollution at the World Environmental Summit that held in Brazil in 1993. Ugiomoh and Nnamdi (2014) remarked:

The context above is a microcosmic reflection of the Niger Delta imbroglio. As exemplar, it aimed at re-establishing the might of government, and thereby serves as a warning signal to other incubating uprisings in the region against challenging the authority of the government (p. 143).

Onobrakpeya's approach in these works reflects a memorable impression of oppression by the then Federal Government of Nigeria for the death sentence passed on Saro-Wiwa and his Ogoni kinsmen. These art works stand as metaphors which project the truth of the deceit, injustice and betrayal associated with the death of these men who were fighting for the right of the Ogoni oil communities in relation to resource control. It must be noted, however, that "while we seem to celebrate "metaphor" here as a veritable tool of social change through veiled criticism of tyrannical regimes, we are quite cognizant that "metaphor" can sometimes lead to misconception and misinterpretation" (Ugiomoh and Nnamdi, 2014, p. 144)

Onobrakpeya's *Statue of Freedom (Ogoni Nine)* (Fig. 5) is a water colour painting with nine elongated figures, wearing what looks like black bowler hats with white facial expressions in strong lines. Their bodies look stiff, showing that they were murdered in cold blood. At the bottom part of the water colour painting are people wailing and crying. Colours used by the artist are black, prussian blue, sap green and yellow ochre. In *Martyrdom of Ogoni Nine* (Fig. 6), however, the artist uses acrylic on triptilinen canvas to depict nine figures, each carrying what looks like a child in each hand. Onobrakpeya's experience as an artist is evident in the techniques he applies in this painting to portray the gestures, trace outlines in representation of forms and to deliberately create his artistic visual metaphor that is original and meaningful.

Both artworks are visual metaphors that address issues revolving around the hanging of the 'Ogoni Nine' and they embody a configuration of forms that are interwoven to look like totems. They also fully represent the death sentence passed upon Kenule Sara-Wiwa and his fellow Ogoni sons.

Clearly, these works are a reflection of Onobrakpeya's emotional and mental response to the predicament of the 'Ogoni Nine' through which he leaves the subject and its fallouts open to discussion from varying perspectives and, thus, different interpretations. Also, the retrospective view of the stories behind the paintings enables people to remember what happened years ago. The paintings, therefore, serve as visual metaphors of the sacrifices of these men in fighting the cause of the Niger Delta and a tribute to their courage. They are sources of encouragement to those taking over the fight for the freedom of the land and its people.

### **Diseye Tantua**

Diseye Tantua has proven his ingenuity and resourcefulness in the area of artistic expression through painting, print and installation art, rebranding and fragmentation of motor car structures into functional household seats. Tantua is a graduate of the Department of Fine Applied Art, Rivers State College of Education now Ignatius Ajuru University Port Harcourt. A practicing Studio artist, he has made a great impact on Art and Art Education beyond Rivers State.

One major work art created by him is the portrait of the iconic fallen hero, Kenule Saro-Wiwa, popularly called Ken Saro-Wiwa, the leader of the 'Ogoni Nine'.



Fig. 7. Remember Ken Saro-Wiwa  
(Acrylic on Canvas) Artist: Diseye Tantua  
Source: *S'Art: The art of Diseye Tantua* (exhibition catalogue), 2017.

This painting is a visual metaphor which projects Saro-Wiwa as an icon and hero of all times. Rather than diminish, his hanging made a martyr out of him and, by contrast, made the Head of State, General Sanni Abacha very unpopular as the Nigerian populace lost confidence in him and his Government. Painted in hues of red and silver, the portrait shows Saro-Wiwa smoking a pipe. The facial expression in the painting is created in black and white with an orange background. There is also the reflection of light on the right side of the face, while the shirt has a black shadow and reflection of light on its back. Tantua used the artwork as a visual metaphor to commemorate the role Ken Saro-Wiwa played in the struggle for environment restoration and resource control in the oil-rich land of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Deseye's visual metaphors are also highlighted through forms of transportation ranging from the pre-independence to post-independence period of the Nigerian political structure and space. Some of the captions on these vehicles (trucks and lorries etc.) such as "Travel and See" and "Don't Worry Be Happy", are metaphors of the past and present.

These two captions serve as the titles of two paintings based on the forms of transportation that existed between the latter part of the 1950s and early 1970s in Port Harcourt City and various parts of Nigeria. Modernity in terms of transportation was not very evident in Nigeria during this period. Most lorries were constructed with wood and partitioned into first and second class compartments. In the paintings below, titled *Don't Worry Be Happy* (Fig. 8) and *Travel and See* (Fig. 9), the artist through the use of visual metaphors, captures the sentiments that people should forget about the problems of the moment and spread their wings.

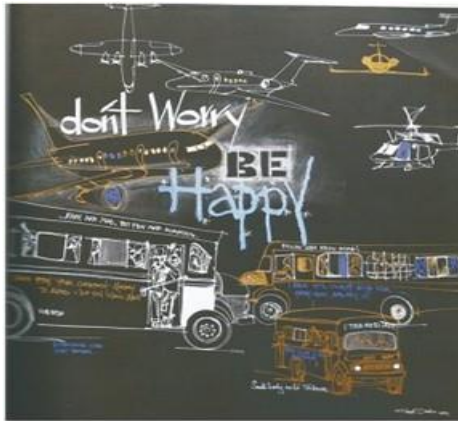


Fig. 8. Don't Worry be Happy  
(Acrylic on Canvas) 2017

Year: 2017

Artist: Diseye Tantua

Source: Source: *S'Art: The art of Diseye Tantua* (exhibition catalogue), 2017.

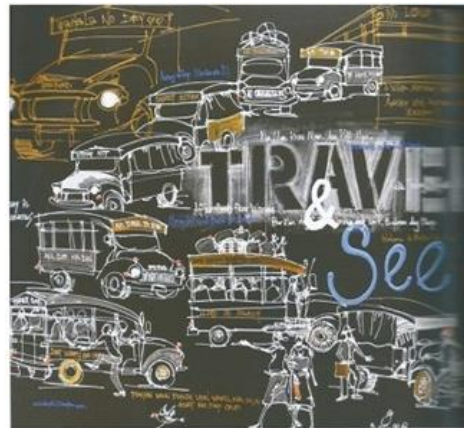


Fig. 9. Travel & See (Acrylic on Canvas)  
122x153cm

Year: 2017

Artist: Diseye Tantua

Also, through these metaphors, Nigerians can recall the modes of transportation of the 1950s to early 1970s and the then trendy but humorous inscriptions on these vehicles such as “Many Are Mad But Few Are Roaming”; “Follow Who Know Road”; “Tire No Bi Lazy”; “Don't Worry”; “Na Man Know Man Dey Kill Man” etc.

Today, the modern transportation system comprises newer models of buses and other modern vehicles which ply the streets and highways. Most of these vehicles are now produced with metal and iron, moreso, wooden lorries are no longer common. Tantua's visual metaphors are reminders of the tremendous development in the transportation system in Port Harcourt and Nigeria as a nation.

### **Dodd N. Brown**

Dodd N. Brown, a Port Harcourt-based artist, is an energetic and vibrant painter. A graduate of the Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt, his creative artwork titled *Assembly of Network* (Fig. 10) is a painting of commercial motorcyclists known as ‘Okada riders’ making phone calls while seated on their bikes. Behind them are passengers also engaged in making calls.



Fig. 10. Assembly of Network (Oil on Canvas)

Artist: Dodd N. Brown

Source: *Society of Nigerian Artists (Rivers State Chapter) Catalogue*, 2017.

These acts are regarded as social visual metaphors. The painting has a strong visual message of social communication while the ‘Okada riders’ on duty wait to earn their wages from the commercialization of ‘Okada’ transportation. The painting shows a busy street in Port Harcourt and the movement of vehicles and commuters. This artwork is rendered in the naturalistic form.

### **Aduche Iche-Okoro**

Aduche Iche-Okoro is a graduate of the Rivers State College of Education (now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education) and the Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt. His painting titled *Oil Wheel* (Fig. 11) is a mixed media painting created in brilliant, basic primary colours with an abstract figure in the middle of picture. The figures are mechanical rotary wheels in the oil production sector, either in crude or palm oil production. As a visual metaphor, it emphasizes the economic impact of oil production on man.



**Fig. 11. Oil Wheel**

(Mixed Media Painting)

Artist: Aduche A. Iche-Okoro

Source: Aduche A. Iche-Okoro

This visual metaphor, also referred to as mechanical metaphor, is a visual reminder of the process of oil production in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

### **Etido Effiong Inyang**

Etido Effiong Inyang is one of the foremost and, indeed, a printmaker whose impact in his field is felt beyond the Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt. He has demonstrated his printing techniques at several workshops in Nigeria including the Bruce Onobrakpeya Harmattan Workshop Series in Agbara-Otor, Delta State.

Printmaking describes a variety of techniques developed to create multiple copies of single images (Frank, 2006, p. 127). Inyang's work, titled *Circle of Life* (Fig. 12), which portrays the movement and flow of colours can be interpreted as the flow of crude oil as a blessing to the Nigerian economy.



Fig. 12. Circle of Life, 2015  
(Print Making)  
Artist: Etido Effiong Inyang  
Source: Etido Effiong Inyang

This visual metaphor captures a strong figure of a woman in the midst of a movement of forms reminiscent of the flow of crude oil and its impact on the ecology of the environment and the people of the creeks of the Niger Delta region. The metaphor also captures the essence of oil spillages from pipeline explosions. They remind us of the mixed blessings associated with crude oil exploration and production in Nigeria.

### **Kingsley Gomka**

Gomka is a young, dynamic student artist of the Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. His water colour paintings titled Explosion I, II, and III (Figs. 13, 14 and 15) are imaginative compositions on the explosion of oil pipelines around the creeks in Port Harcourt, architecture, land and water space. The realization is that the water colour paintings address visual metaphors on the hazards of crude oil exploration (metaphors of explosion) around the creeks on the waterways.



Fig. 13. Explosion I (Water Colour) 2018  
Artist: Kingsley Gomka



Fig. 14. Explosion II (Water Colour) 2018  
Artist: Kingsley Gomka



Fig. 15. Explosion III Refinery (Water Colour) 2018  
Artist: Kingsley Gomka  
Source: Kingsley Gomka (IT Portfolio)

The artist's paintings signify some visual elements that are hard to forget - burning flames of oil, polluted waters and the desolate people and environment. Secondly, the fishermen paddling their boat and watching the explosion reflect the helplessness of the people in the face of such calamities which destroy the aquatic life that is their means of sustenance, and impact their health negatively. Mostly, it is a metaphor of the hopelessness of their situation.

Thirdly, Explosion III (Fig. 15) captures the explosion of a refinery. The visual metaphor here focuses on the destruction of the structure of the refinery and the huge monetary loss involved in such an explosion.

### Nics O. Ubogu

Nics Onataghogho Ubogu is a contemporary African artist who draws inspiration from everyday events in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of the Nigerian Society, and employs a variety of media and techniques in the creation of his art. Ubogu is a lecturer in Fine Arts and Design at the University of Port Harcourt. The artist is highly interested in painting pictures in abstraction which is evident in his artwork titled *Remember Oil Flow I, II and III* (Figs. 16, 17 and 18). *Remember Oil Flow I* (Fig. 16) is a painting in abstract showing lines and circular forms. The movement of blue, yellow and red lines represents oil flow on the earth's surface. Also, there is a concentration of round objects in different colours at the bottom of the mixed media painting which represent the different attributes of the oil. *Remember Oil Flow II* (Fig. 17) represents the flame of the burning crude oil. At the bottom part of the acrylic painting, the "black gold" is represented in black hues of red and the upper part of the painting is a blue, red and yellowish flame. In *Remember Oil Flow III* (Fig. 18), the colours are prussian blue black and reddish brown on strawboard. The movement of oil is highly concentrated in the middle of the painting.



Fig. 16. Remember Oil Flow I  
2014 (Mixed Media Painting)  
Artist: Nics O. Ubogu  
Source: Nics O. Ubogu's Gallery



Fig. 17. Remember Oil Flow II  
2014 (Acrylic)  
Artist: Nics O. Ubogu



Fig. 18. Remember Oil Flow III  
2014 (Acrylic)  
Artist: Nics O. Ubogu

According to Ugiomoh (2014), "While we cannot all be artists, the artist's synthesizing will, which an encounter with reality allows remain our very close companions in the constructed metaphor. A metaphor, as sign bearer, thus instructs and informs and will always demand our attention" (p. 3). This observation is valid and finds substance in Ubogu's symbolization of the importance of crude oil revenue in the development of the nation and host communities. When properly managed, it adds to the improvement of the standard of living within the host communities through the development of facilities such as roads, schools, hospitals, clean water facilities, and electricity.

In his work titled *Fishing Net in Crude Oil* (Fig. 19, mixed media painting; 2014) and *Oil Byproduct* (fig. 20, installation; 2014), the artist demonstrated creativity by using fishing net on canvas, tied together and painted in different colours of green, blue, red and yellow. The

message of this visual metaphor is that oil pollution has destroyed aquatic life. It is a visual metaphor of protest.



Fig. 19. Fishing Net in Crude Oil 2014 (Mixed Media Painting)  
Artist: Nics O. Ubogu  
Source: Nics O. Ubogu's Gallery



Fig. 20. Oil Byproduct 2018 (Installation)  
Artist: Nics O. Ubogu

*Oil Byproduct* (Installation; 2014), however, is an installation art consisting of refined products of crude oil used to service the engine of vehicles. The idea of using a vehicle tyre as part of the artwork is a natural means of creative expression in visual metaphor. The artistic composition is a reminder of the positive aspects of oil exploration.

### Conclusion

The City of Port Harcourt, after the discovery of crude oil in 1956, has undergone major transformations historically, politically, socially and economically. Many artists of Port Harcourt and the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have drawn their inspiration and themes from these environments and from the events of everyday life that occur in these environments many of which revolve around oil exploration and exploitation. Many of these works also serve as records of the city's historical and social-cultural development. Frank, in his assessment of the arts asserts that they “foster the development of our inner world, the intuitive, emotional, spiritual, and creative aspects of being human” (2006, p. 4). This observation is true of the artistic works presented in this paper which are a harvest of visual metaphors that have contributed to the development of modern paintings in Nigerian art.



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