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The Woodcarving Genre of Lamidi Olonade Fakeye: A Synthesis of Multiple Artworlds

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Abstract

Lamidi Olonade Fakeye's (1928-2009) woodcarving practice from 1938-2009, bestrides different Artworlds that span from the colonial to the modern art practice periods in Nigeria. A number of studies on Lamidi exist, the trailblazer being Kevin Carroll's (1967) book on Yoruba Religious Carvings. This paper analyses a trajectory of his practice within longstanding Yoruba woodcarving and modern art traditions, by interrogating his training, formal repertoire, theme and patronage pattern. Adopting the biographical and formalistic methods of art historical writing, library sources, interviews and participant observation have been employed as instruments for data collection, validation, and analysis. Conclusively, the paper advances a categorization paradigm in Lamidi's practice. This is aimed at situating him within the matrix of Nigerian art history and development.

Key Words: Artworlds, Longstanding Traditions, Igbomina/ Ekiti, Periodization, Categorization

Introduction

The sculpture practice of Lamidi Olonade Fakeye (1928-2009) indulges a period of seventy-one years (1938-2009). An assessment of his years of practice reveals a systematic profile that accords a progressive and dynamic development. This dynamism is an import of the different artworlds that provided various contexts for him. The different artworlds espouses different levels and types of training, mentorship as well as exposure to both local and international visibility. A comparative assessment of his lowly beginning in his father's workshop in 1938 where he carved an Ere Ibeji and his carving demonstration at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, USA barely three months to his death showcases the extremities of the contexts of his creative trajectory. Within these years, three artistic nuances can be ascribed to Lamidi. These are traditional, neo-traditional and modern tendencies.

Whereas different authorities have written on Lamidi, his autobiography as edited by Height (1996), provides data on his developmental progression up till its year of publication. Whereas these

publications are insightful, none has attempted a periodization profile for his formal development. This lacuna possibly stems from a fixed profile of formal association usually ascribed to him as a traditional or neo-traditional sculptor. (Morton, 2010; Shylon, 2010). Such assessment tendency definitely blurs scholarly attempts at formal diversity and eventual classifications. This identified limitation which inadvertently stereotypes his practice has also limited scholar's attempts at classifying him beyond his Yoruba social context.

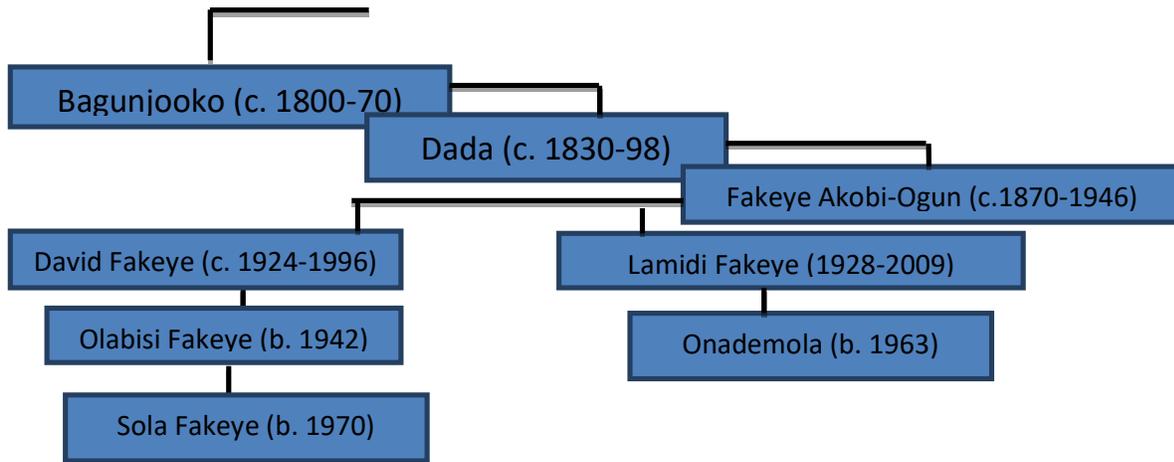
Based on the biographical and formalistic methods of art historiography, this paper provides a holistic overview of Lamidi's practice. This is through an interrogation of his genealogical roots upon which his biography is established. Also a periodization profile of his practice is identified as well as his patronage pattern established. The paper concludes with an attempt at classifying his status within the larger profile of art practice in Nigeria.

A Historical Perspective of Lamidi's Woodcarving Lineage

Lamidi Olonade Fakeye (1928-2009) hails from a family which traces its wood carving lineage back to seven generations (Fakeye, Bruce & David 2006, p.40). He is the ninth child (fourth son) of Akobi-Ogun Fakeye (c. 1870-1946). According to him, he belongs to the fifth generation of what he calls "Fakeye Woodcarving Dynasty" which is traced to Olawonyi the progenitor of the family woodcarving genealogy.

Olawonyi is the founder of Omido community in present-day Kwara state. His son Bagunjooko took after his father's woodcarving and later migrated to Ila-Orangun. On arrival, he participated in the Oro festival woodcarving competition and his impressive performance earned him for wife Adenumi (daughter of the Orangun [King] of Ila). Their son Dada took up woodcarving but abandoned it for farming due to financial reasons. Dada's son Fakeye Akobi-Ogun retraced to woodcarving being an Ifa diviners' instruction who alluded his small-pox disease ailment as punishment of the gods due to the abandonment of the family woodcarving career. The young Fakeye was then apprenticed to Tayewo of Ore's compound in Ila at the age of twenty-two (c.1892). All the sons of Fakeye Akobi-Ogun (Aduwuyi, Adeosun, Lamidi, Joseph, and Ganiyu) were involved in woodcarving except for James who specialized in wood lumbering. Most of the sons in the next generation (Akin and Adebisi [sons of Adewuyi], Oladejo, Olabisi and Olaniyi [sons of Adeosun], Jacob Abegunde [son of Onayemi Lamidi's elder sister], Onademola [son of Lamidi Fakeye], Sunday [son of Joseph] and Azeez [son of Ganiyu] have practiced woodcarving. The practice has also been carried into the seventh generation with Jimoh, Lukeman, and Akeem (sons of Akin), Sola (son of Olabisi) and the budding Toluwanimi (son of Onademola) as woodcarvers (interviews with Lamidi: 2007, Olabisi: 2005, Sola:2007, Onademola: 2012).

In the study, a reconstruction of the genealogy nomenclature as "Olawonyi Woodcarving Dynasty" as against "Fakeye Woodcarving Dynasty" has been advocated (Edewor: 2009). This is premised on the logic that since the Lamidi traces his woodcarving traits to Olawonyi, a rational family identity on him becomes common sense. A concise and abridged family genealogy can be tabled as thus,



Diag. 1, Reconstructed Olawonyi Woodcarving Dynasty: Edewor:2009

This generational sketch can further be illustrated by identifying some woodcarvings in the seven-generation family tree (Fig 1-7).



Fig 1: (1st Generation), Olawonyi's Opo Ile, wood and white patina, (18th century) Courtesy Lamidi Fakeye



Fig 2: (2nd Generation), Bagunjooko, Wood, Ht. 28cm, c. 1850, courtesy, National Museum, Lagos

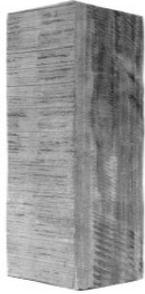


Fig 3: (3rd Generation), Dada, abandoned the carving tradition for farming



Fig 4: (4th Generation), Fakeye Akobi-Ogun, Epa Mask, Wood c.1935, Ht. 92cm, Courtesy, National Museum, Lagos



Fig 5: (5th Generation), Lamidi Fakeye, Warrior (Jagun Jagun), Wood, Ht. 45cm, 2005, Photo by Edewor Nelson



Fig 6: (6th Generation), Olabisi Fakeye, Adura Lo N Gba-Agbara Ko, Wood, Ht. 102cm, 2003, Courtesy, Olabisi Fakeye



Fig 7: (7th Generation) Sola Fakeye, Mask, Wood, 46cm, 2008, Photo by Edewor Nelson

Biographical Sketch of Lamidi Olonade Fakeye's Practice

Account of Lamidi Fakeye's life has been addressed in different published texts. Kevin Carroll's (1967) book "Yoruba Religious Carvings", is amongst the first in that regard. In 1996, his autobiography (Lamidi, Height, and Curl: Eds) was published. This book gave impetus to Agari Babatunde: 1998 and Perani Judith's:1997 articles which are critiques and reviews of that book. A summary of these accounts and oral interviews with Lamidi' and others provides a biographical sketch for this paper.

Lamidi's first attempt at wood carving was at the age of ten in 1938. That attempt, according to him amplified his given name "Olonade" (the carver has come) and provided a pedestal for his future consuming interest for woodcarving practice. Within the social conditions and needs of his environment as he grew into youthful years, the concepts of his works revolved around Omolangidi (play doll) and Ere Ibeji (Twin figurines). According to him, his encounter with Arewogun's Opo Ile (veranda posts) in 1945 ignited a need to attempt more complex works (Fig. 9).

By 1948, providence shone on him and became apprenticed to Bamidele Arowogun (son of Awowogun whose veranda posts he encountered three years earlier). This was under the auspices of the Oye-Ekiti Workshop centre as facilitated by Kevin Carroll and Sean O'Mahony (two Irish Roman Catholic Priests). The workshop was founded on Provincial Kelly's pursuit of Cardinal Celso Constantini's concept of "Inculturation" which was "creation of indigenous Christian art, thereby helping a person, through artistic expression, to figure out how to be a Christian and an African at the same time" (Bridger,2009:108). During the workshop, Lamidi created works for both Christian and Orisa religious needs as the occasion demanded while exploring longstanding art forms of Igbomina and Ekiti styles.

At the closure of the workshop in 1954, Lamidi remained under the mentorship of Carroll who was posted to different locations as school principal starting with Holy Cross School, Lagos. Their association resulted in several exhibitions in Ibadan and Lagos (1960-1962). After the 1962 exhibition in Lagos, Lamidi was awarded a French scholarship for Diploma in Stone carving at Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Art in Paris, France in recognition of his outstanding performance in the series of exhibitions. On completion of the Diploma Programme in 1963, he went to Michigan, U.S.A. for his first Residency at the Institute of Art Kalamazoo and had his first U.S exhibition there in 1963.

The success that greeted Lamidi's practice from 1964-1973, is evident in the numerous commissions and patronages he enjoyed as well as oversea travels to the United States of America. In those travels, he had Residency and woodcarving demonstration sessions at the Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, and other institutions. Within this period, his brothers in the persons of Ganiyu, Joseph as well as nephews (Jacob Abegunde, Olabisi, Akin and Dejo) apprenticed and worked under his mentorship in his Ibadan studio.

In 1976 Lamidi applied for the position of an Artist-in-Residence with the School of African Studies at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife and got appointed as an Art Fellow at the Fine and Applied Arts Department in 1978. This opening provided a formidable studio for him and avenue for more international practice through visits abroad. He retired in 2002. The greatest landmark of Lamidi at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife is the commissioned statue of Oduduwa (fig. 8). The piece was unveiled by the Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade Olubuse to the admiration of attendees comprising of most of the Obas of the then Oyo state, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the University community.



Fig 8, Lamidi, Oduduwa statue of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Iroko Wood, 13ft x 4ft (1987)

The last seven years of Lamidi's life (2002-2009) in retirement are very significant to his practice. His stylistic variations and developments attained a climax in formal complexity, precision, and expressivity with a robust homegrown patronage. In 2006 he received the prestigious, Living Human Treasure UNESCO award (2006) in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria.

On October 21st, 2009, Lamidi was treated to being a guest at the exhibition of some of his works at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo with the theme "Celebrate the Life of Lamidi Fakeye". He also made demonstrations of woodcarving as he always does during such visits. Lamidi returned to his Ile-Ife home of over three decades. Barely two months later, on the 25th of December 2009, he passed on after a brief illness. His demise marked the eclipse of the 5th generation of the Olawonyi Woodcarving Dynasty of which he was the last survivor. He was buried according to Islamic rites in his Ila-Orangun hometown.

Synthesizing Lamidi Fakeye's wood carving Practice within Traditional and Modern Art Systems: A Periodization

Lamidi's practice as stated earlier spans from 1938-2009. This covers the Nigerian colonial period when traditional art practice was rife through the period of independence when modern art culture as promoted by formal school art was instituted.

A periodization model is helpful for understanding his seventy-one (71) years artistic trajectory. Edewor (2009:132-143) opines that such a model can only be affixed using the Oye-Ekiti Workshop years as a framework. This is because of the importance of those years of his practice. In an interview with His Royal Majesty, Oluwole Ademolaju (Adugbole III, Oloye of Oye Kingdom) in 2012, he said: "You cannot discuss Lamidi Fakeye without mentioning Oye-Ekiti". The identified periods are; Pre Oye-Ekiti Period (1938-1948), Oye-Ekiti Period (1949-1961), Early Post Oye-Ekiti Period (1961-1996) and Late Post Oye-Ekiti Period (1997-2009). This timeline evokes issues relating his diverse art training (traditional apprenticeship, workshop facilitated apprenticeship and Western art formal training), formal repertoire, thematic contexts and patronage patterns. These aspects reflect his ability to synthesize multiple Artworlds.

A. Pre-Oye Ekiti (1938-1948)

The Pre-Oye-Ekiti period relates the period of his first attempt at woodcarving in 1938 (age ten) to 1947 when he enlisted in the Oye-Ekiti workshop. A peep at Lamidi's first art training at age ten is

the traditional apprenticeship. First under his father and later under his elder brother (Adewuyi). African apprenticeship training creates a master out of an apprentice by imitation. In such training system, longstanding formal traditions are preserved, conserved and secured for future generations. For Lamidi, this training grounded him in the Igbomina formal style while expressing himself through simple Omolangidi (play dolls) and Ere Ibeji (twin) figures. The Igbomina style has characteristics such as bulbous face with serrated eyelids, large but flat feet, patterned pubic section, and details for finger and toenails. On a general note, the composition is simple with plain surface quality (Fig. 2).

Photographic data of Lamidi's earliest works in this period may not be available, but his "Horse Rider" Fig 9 produced in c. 1945 provides some impetus to his level of development at that time. The piece presents a frontal statuette of an equestrian. The work's formal character, though exploring some spatial relation is mathematically set in a tight right-angle composition bereft of dynamic posture. The emphasis on the head and gear, elongated neck and sit tight orientation with diminutive legs, no doubt, is a relatively bold step of a young wood carver aping his father's EPA (fig 4) which bears the same human formalism over a helmet mask.



Fig 9: Lamidi Fakeye, Horse Rider, Wood, t.33cm, c.1945, Courtesy, Lamidi Fakeye



Fig 10: Fakeye Akobi-Ogun, head Mask, Wood, c.1935, Ht. 92cm, Courtesy, National Museum, Lagos

In the late 1930s, when Lamidi's practice began, traditional Yoruba Orisa worship systems were still prominent. Christianity and Islam were relatively new and had not taken root in the Igbomina/ Ekiti regions. Wood carvings of revered traditional Pantheons were the objects and symbols of worship and veneration. John Pemberton III: 1977, has identified the role sacred symbols played in Igbomina society. Under such socio-religious system Lamidi's works Omolangidi (doll), Ere Ibeji (Twin figures) found thematic definition and patronage.

B. Oye-Ekiti Period (1949-1961)

The Oye-Ekiti period spans the six years of Lamidi's participation at the Oye-Ekiti Workshop (1949-1954) and the other seven years he remained under the mentorship of Rev Fr. Kevin Carroll (now Principal of schools) after the disbandment of the workshop in 1954 by the Catholic Mission. Oye-Ekiti Workshop training is somewhat a hybridized apprenticeship system. A situation where a superior authority (institutional facilitator) assigns roles and themes to a master trainer under whom a studio trainee is guided. Under this arrangement, Lamidi was assigned as an apprentice to Bamidele Arowogun (master woodcarver) who in turn was under the supervision of Carroll and O'Mahony. Lamidi never missed any moment during interviews to eulogize Bamidele whom he referred to as

“My Master” and Carroll as “My Father”. This structure dictated the themes, formal and thematic proclivity as well as clientele.

Figs 11-16 express the formalism related to this period. In fig 11 for example, two works are photographed together. These are Bamidele (left) and Lamidi’s (right) works. The Lamidi’s figure is a trainee attempt at copying his master Bamidele’s work. Indeed the Lamidi’s piece (Olumeye) is a simplified version of Bamidele’s piece. This is clearly shown in the facial detailing, as well as overall compositional structure and embellishment. Even though Lamidi’s work presents some originality in terms of the hair-do, that formal tendency is akin to his father’s Epa mask heir-do in fig. 4. Such cross-formal integration mirrors Lamidi’s formalistic crisis at harnessing his Igbomina style background with Ekiti style. Within this formal matrix, Lamidi’s forms present highly emphasized head proportion with accentuated eyelids, rigid frontal pose with slight movement of the hands, stout base related figures bearing some cut-out patterns and sparse figure surface adornment.



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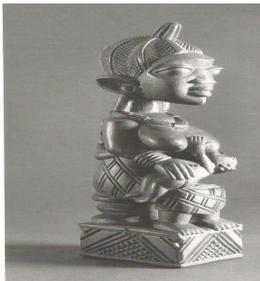
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Fig 11, Bamidele (left), Lamidi (right), Olumeye, Wood, c.1948/ c.1949. Photo by Lamidi at the National Museum, Lagos

Figs 12 and 13, Lamidi Fakeye, Wise Men from the East, Wood, c. 1953, Photo by Edewor Nelson



14



15



16

Fig 14, Lamidi Fakeye, the Third Wise Man, Mixed Media, 1949/1950

Fig 15, Fig 16, The Flute Player, Mahogany, 1960

Fig 16, Kneeling Woman; Mahogany, 1960

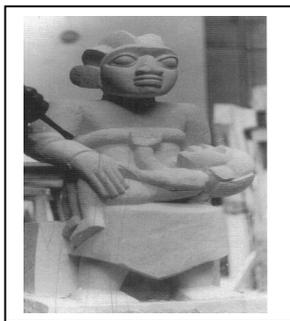
The identity crisis for Lamidi is also clearly shown within this period in his response to themes. While figs 12-14 express Christian themes, though retaining Igbomina/Ekiti formalism, figs 15-16 centres on traditional paradigms related to Orisa worship. This thematic relation is critical for the appreciation of religious tolerance associated with Yoruba communities at that time (Peel, 1977).

The Oye-Ekiti experiment though self-serving could be reasoned as one of those decolonization postures of the Roman Catholic Church in its attempt at Africanization of Church liturgy and iconography. Bridger, 2002:108 noted thus, “the idea of the Oye-Ekiti art workshop (1947-1954) challenged the dominant colonial and clerical attitudes towards the local culture and signaled a clear step away from Eurocentric status quo”. The works of Lamidi in this period, while retaining forms that replete Igbomina/Ekiti traditions, inculcated Christian themes in addressing the expectations of his employer-patron.

C. Early Post Oye-Ekiti (1962-1996)

Early Post Oye-Ekiti period attests to a period of fourteen years, which account from 1962 when he gained admission to study in France in 1966, at what time his autobiography was published. Lamidi’s departure abroad for studies formalized his severance from Kevin Carroll’s superintendence. Specializing in stone carving and cement sculpture, he obtained a Diploma certificate in 1963. During this training, Lamidi was exposed to a formal art curriculum that emphasized drawing, composition, media exploration and modern techniques for art making. The training apart from providing new skills and improved formalism in terms of character and composition earned him a measure of qualification which enabled his art training career (Instructor) at the Obafemi Awolowo University from 1987 to 2002.

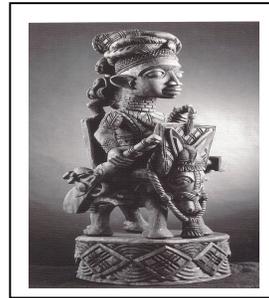
The works in this period now tilted towards Ekiti formalism accentuated a level of formal dexterity. A comparison of fig 17 (Mother and child) with an earlier piece with the same title produced during the Ekiti Period (Fig. 16), provides a differential deduction. This is clearly discernable in the formal precision of facial character, compositional rightness and stability, pose and mastery of media (stone carving in progress). Fig 17, is definitely more dexterous than that in fig. 16 which presents a naive composure. A closer study of the baby in both compositions also amplifies this difference. In “Bowl Bearer” and “Mounted Warrior” (figs. 18 and 19), intricacies in body adornment patterns, non stereotyped and rigid poses as well as numerous compositional appendages to the main figure elevate these works beyond the previous pieces with formal simplicity, rigidity and embellishment frugality. Another major compositional character is the proportion of the head to the entire body which has reduced considerably.



17



18



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Fig 17, Lamidi Fakeye, Mother and Child, stone, Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1963, Courtesy of Lamidi Fakeye

Fig 18, Lamidi, Woman with Bowl, Wood, Ht. 57cm, Courtesy- Kelvin Carroll, 1964

Fig 19, Mounted warrior, Wood, Ht, 71cm, 1992, Courtesy, Lamidi Fakeye



Fig 20, Lamidi Fakeye, Justice, Wood, 51 x 58cm, 1993, Courtesy of Lamidi Fakeye

Lamidi's themes in this period can best be described as expressions of cultural values and systems bounded by traditional religious formal lexicons. According to him while training in France, he was advised in not to jettison his African forms, especially as Nigerian independence was already gained, rather that he should incorporate African forms as an instrument for contemporary discourses. Within this insight, his themes and formalism retained Yoruba culture with interpretations revolving around contemporary issues. In "Woman with Bowl" for example (Fig. 18) African womanhood though seemingly acquiescent is expressed as an icon of society's nourishment, industriousness in dynamic multiple roles, the personification of beauty, epitome of peace and organized society and service to humanity. In "Justice" (fig 20), Lamidi laments the injustice associated with the annulment of June 12th, 1993 presidential election presumably won by Chief Mooshod Abiola by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida who was the Military Head of State at that time. In the work, an attempt was made at using cultural and religious elements associated with Sango worship as an instrument for defining the concept.

D. Late Oye-Ekiti Period (1997-2009)

The Late Oye-Ekiti period represents the climax of Lamidi's formalism and astuteness as one of the finest and consistent wood sculptors Nigeria has ever produced. This period postdates his published autobiography. For a scholarly research and seasoned opinion, his prior experiences (training, practice, and teaching) became condensed into a new climax of formal appropriation at the turn of the new millennium. This period in Lamidi's practice received a drastic formal detour within his style. Height: 2010, one of Lamidi's most outstanding friends and artistic companion in the US, substantiates this line of thought with the assertion that, "Lamidi made a second shift in style over the last decade after he retired from the University... and has found new patrons".

The works of this period present a formalism of many years of personal development, training, travels, and experiences. The formal character of the works evokes from a synthesis of traditional formalism with western type proportions. While retaining traditional formal elements, figures in this period appear to have grown taller, slimmer, more formally dynamic, naturalistic in facial character and expressions, intricate in composition/ embellishment, and base patterns appearing as abstract compositions yet not over exaggerated. The works also have a release of freshness and freedom from media limitations in their general expressivity. In that case, they present a classical appeal which compares with any well-developed art genre anywhere in the world.

This new formal result can be traced to his continued interaction with his art students whose routine curriculum emphasizes Western genres of art. Figs 21-24 present a range of these characters. In “Woman Offering Kola-nuts” (Fig 23), but for her quite emphasized head and breast, the body forms are naturalistic and organic unlike the cylindrical limb formal presentation in previous works. During an interview when asked why this new formal character in his works? He answered tersely “a man must sleep before he dreams”.



Fig 21, Lamidi Fakeye, Odo Sango, Wood, 2003, Photo by Edewor Nelson

Fig 22, Lamidi Fakeye, House Post, Wood, 2003, Photo by Edewor Nelson

Fig 23, Lamidi Fakeye, Woman Offering Kola-nuts, Wood, Ht. 74cm, 2005, Photo by Edewor Nelson

Fig 24, Lamidi Fakeye, Sango, Wood, Ht. 57cm, 2008, Photo by Edewor Nelson

During this period, the title his works continue to replete religious archetypes as a metaphor for present-day Nigeria. The pieces satirize socio-political systems in modern Nigeria; religious bigotry and extremism, sycophancy, overbearing leadership, broken promises, social inequality, non-respect for the law by those in power, firearm struggle/ militancy/ insurgency, and the winner takes it all syndrome. These expressions are vividly expressed in a work such as “Sango” (fig. 24). Sango the deified ruler in Yoruba mythology is revered due to his attributed spiritual powers which can be invoked as instrument for destruction against enemy agents. The present-day Nigerian democratic structure seems to entrench a system where an election victor acclaims himself as “conqueror” under the guise of democratic responsibility, is usually a terror to opposing political elements. Another concept that is recurrent over the ages in his works is the “Horse Rider Warrior” (Fig. 20). The concept of the horse rider in Yoruba art can be seen from the perspective of images that reflect conquest and ultimate possession (Picton, 1994:203-226). The concept assumes a visual metaphor for expressing autocratic leadership and social injustice that pervades the political terrain in Nigeria.

An Overview of Patronage in Lamidi's Practice

Patronage in association with Lamidi's practice grew steadily over the years and has a robust local and international reach. This section appraises this aspect as a measure of identifying the level of impact that his practice had on his environment.

Earliest patronage for Lamidi's work can be traced to his Omolangidi (children doll) pieces. According to him, the pieces sold for a penny each in the market. In the early 1940s, he concentrated on household utensils with his elder brothers which sold for 6 pence each. His first commission was the production of an Ere Ibeji figure for an afflicted surviving twin girl (Adehunmi). Payment was made in items which included two kola-nuts, two smoked fish, two bush rats, a rooster, and breakfast every morning till the work was completed (Fakeye et al 1996, p.79). This payment in kind rather than cash structure followed the usual form of charges made by other established wood carvers at that time who received food items as an exchange for their creative enterprises. In fact, Lamidi's charges were premised on his father's example for such purposes. By and large, his works were appreciated within the community. This patronage system provided a platform for financial sustenance during the early period of his practice.

Within the Ekiti period, Lamidi's primary and basic needs rested on the workshop facilitators. Carroll also allowed the woodcarvers to gain commissions from local religious worshippers. Soon after the workshop was disbanded, Lamidi, the now trained and expert woodcarver began to gain prominence as he won prizes and trophies at art competitions in the Western Nigerian Region. Lamidi in an interview ruminated on how Father Carroll acted like a manager and benefactor to him after the workshop period. A situation whereby Carroll negotiated, assigned and disbursed money to him at intervals for his upkeep. His success at his exhibition in March 1960, is attributable to Carroll's effort. Within this period, one of his Epa masks sold for Three Pounds (Fakeye et al 1996, p.109).

In the 1960s (before and after he returned from Paris), till the late 1990s, his patrons were mostly expatriates and agencies/ institutions. Dr. Fred and Mrs. Isabel Beeler, Mr. Pilcher, Mr. L.P. Garo, Jean Herskovits, Western Michigan University (WMU), National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian and John Kennedy African Center, Washington D.C are among the list of individuals and institutions. His overseas travels created more of this situation as his works were rarely accessible within Nigeria.

At the turn of the 21st century, Lamidi's works began to attract Nigerian patronage. A range of Lagos based collectors who championed this new acquisition includes Yemisi Shyllon (he has the highest private collection of Lamidi's works), Sammy Olagbaju, Rasheed Gbadamosi and a host of others. Yemisi Shyllon has in his collection a commissioned 13 feet "Oduduwa" piece (2007). During his 80th birthday, celebrated with the exhibition titled "Timber's Titan" at Mydrim gallery, Lagos, a wide variety of his work was shown for the first time since his exhibition in the 1960s to the Nigerian public. Sowole (2008), in his blog page writes, "Frontline collector, [Sammy] Olagbaju must have waited, eagerly, for a period like this when he would have a pool of works to choose from. He stated that he lost one of the Fakeye's works collected several years ago. The trauma of that loss, he said, has given him concerns...".

This exhibition provided local visibility for his works and a monetary value profile which Lamidi's works can be put. The price list acquired from Mydrim gallery, which hosted the exhibition shows that 'Ilari Sango', 59cm, (2003), was valued at ₦680, 000.00 (\$4,534.00). A Veranda Post, 'Opo Ile' (Musicians and Dancers) 5ft, (1996) at 1.8 million Naira (\$12,000.00) and the least priced work of the 28 pieces showed was 'Agere Ifa', ₦200,000.00 (\$1,400.00).

Since that exhibition, Lamidi's works have also appeared in art auctions organized by major galleries and auction houses in Lagos such as Arthouse auction house and Terra Culture Gallery. The asking

price for one of his “Music Makers” composition (52.07cm) at a 2012 edition of Arthouse Contemporary Limited in the month of May, 2012 was ₦ 400,000-500,000 (\$ 2,500-3,125) while that of Terra Culture on April 2012, (Arugba, 1990, 3ft.) was put up for \$13,334. This trend clearly stipulates that Lamidi’s practice, which started as a local enterprise has grown over the years into a globally acclaimed scale.

Conclusion: A Classification of Lamidi’s Practice

As identified in this essay, Lamidi’s progressive and dynamic practice is constructs of the temporal environments he operated. This paper has been able to weave this idea within the socio-political and economic framework that defined his art. Within this complex, it remains imperative that an appropriate art classification is assigned to him. Such identification though difficult due to seemingly overlapping tendencies, will adequately assign him a place in the history of Nigerian art and future reference.

Nigerian art from the 1900 has been a potpourri of different artworlds which are clearly defined in three tendencies; traditional, neo-traditional and modern. These nuances have been defined under the ambits of training systems, formal applications and iconography (Adepegba, Chika, Fagg...). In the traditional system, the apprenticeship training pervades. The apprenticeship system simply produces a master through the trainee devotion, imitation, and application of a master’s work ethics for personal development. Whereas a craftsmanship status is developed through this system, an apprentice eventually gains freedom and is free to open his own workshop. As identified earlier, Lamidi operated this system at two levels during the pre Oye-Ekiti and Ekiti Periods. This status could have prompted Lamidi when he said during an interview “I am a traditional Artist”. This view has also been touted by Yemisi Shyllon (2010) as recorded in Elizabeth Mortons Memorial publication at Lamidi’s demise when he says “Lamidi is the last “traditional” Yoruba woodcarver whose works was not influenced by western orientation”. Whereas this statement can be restricted to his early practice years, “not influenced by western orientation” definitely falls short of Lamidi’s trajectory as elucidated in the treatise especially in relation to his later years. His practice is a compendium of many artworlds including western practices. He, therefore, cannot be placed on the same pedestal of his woodcarver father and contemporaries whose practice eclipsed without western influence.

Lamidi’s Post Oye-Ekiti years provide another window of classification. The Paris training as well as his United States visits and demonstrations at institutions became the impetus for a Neo-traditional status for him. In the neo-traditional status, Lamidi within the constraints of personal affinity with traditional forms and concepts provided a formalism that tilted more towards the formal canons and context enshrined in Yoruba Ekiti forms. Michael Harris: 1997 writing on *Confluences Ile-Ife, Washington, D.C and the TransAfrican Artist*, posited that “Fakeye is ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, indigenous and international... seem to provide a span in the bridge linking tradition and modernity, Africa and the West, and offer a way of looking at such reconciliations in the work and lives of other artists dealing with such potential conflict.” Also in Edewor Nelson’s Ph.D. thesis, which was written while Lamidi was still alive (completed and defended a month before his death), also upheld the “Neo-Traditional” Classification. Upholding this position, Morton (2010) in her memorial on Lamidi, agrees on the “Neo-Traditional” nomenclature while affixing a transitory location for him between Yoruba longstanding art traditions and Nigerian modern art. For Lamidi such transitional paradigm is not contestable. He once said, “I am a compilation of all my teachers and years of study...from my childhood with family woodcarvers, to the apprenticeship with Master George Bamidele Arowoogun [Areogun], to my travels and study around the world” (www.mnh.si.edu/africavoices/gallery/lamidi/intro.html). He further says, “Bamidele is my master, but if he wakes up today and sees my work, he will clap for me”.

From the forgoing, a Neo-traditional garb will definitely fit Lamidi. However on further interrogation based on the context of the Nigerian art society and practice while taking into consideration a wide spectrum of variables relating to his practice as enumerated above; socio-cultural and religious leanings, art trainings, environmental relations and responses, artistic visibility and trajectory of practice and at the same time his contemporaries (formally and quasi-formally trained) such as Ben Enwounwu (1921-1994), Bruce Onobrakpeya (b. 1932), Uche Okeke (b.1934-2016), Felix Idubor (1928-1991), Ben Osawe (1931-2007) and a host of others who are attributed as modern artists, a new classification for Lamidi becomes imperative. These artists like Lamidi evolved through the ashes of longstanding traditions as observers and participants, attained artistic stature with innate creative audacity while confronting change and continuity in their given genres. To this end, therefore, Lamidi's practice transcends the art for Alta furniture. His works rather stimulate aesthetic satisfaction of no mean repute. It is this premise that Lamidi Fakeye can be classified as a "Modernist" of a new Igbomina/ Ekiti art form.

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