

Exploring Postmodernism in Nigerian Painting

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijiraet.v3.i1.16

Abstract

This paper explores the rise of postmodernist tendencies in Nigerian painting, analyzing how artists subvert, reinterpret, and deconstruct modernist narratives. Unlike the well-studied modernist movements such as natural synthesis, postmodern strategies remain under-examined in Nigerian art scholarship. Through formal analysis and exhibition reviews, the study examines how painters engage in appropriation, irony, hybridity, and conceptual play, aligning with global postmodernism while addressing local realities. Theoretical grounding draws from Baudrillard's simulacra, Jameson's pastiche, Derrida's deconstruction, Lyotard's critique of meta-narratives, and African perspectives like Okwui Enwezor's. Artists such as Uche Okeke, Victor Ehikhamenor, Ngozi Schommers, and Kainebe Osahenye deploy postmodernist strategies to challenge colonial and postcolonial modernism, embedding their works with playful disruption, cultural appropriation, and fragmented identities. This study enriches Nigerian art history by moving beyond linear modernist narratives.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, Nigerian Painting, Cultural Hybridity, Contemporary Art, Visual Deconstruction*

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Background to the Study

Postmodernism, as a critical cultural paradigm, emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction to the limitations of modernism, challenging its ideals of universal truth, linear progress, and aesthetic purity. In contrast to modernism's emphasis on originality, order, and rationality, postmodernism embraces fragmentation, intertextuality, pluralism, and ambiguity (Jameson, 1991; Lyotard, 1984). In the visual arts, this shift allowed artists to appropriate diverse visual languages, blend high and low culture, and undermine the authority of traditional art historical narratives. As Foster et al. (2016) argue, postmodernism enabled artists to “stage a critique of power” through formal experimentation and conceptual disruption.

While the impact of postmodernism has been extensively explored in Euro-American art contexts, its manifestations in African art and specifically Nigerian painting, remain under-theorized (Okeke-Agulu, 2015; Oguibe, 2020). Nigerian modernism, led by artists such as Aina Onabolu, Ben Enwonwu, and Uche Okeke, was historically aligned with nationalist aspirations and cultural reclamation. These artists sought to assert African identity through a synthesis of indigenous aesthetics and Western techniques, a movement famously termed “natural synthesis” by the Zaria Art Society (Ogbechie, 2008; Okeke-Agulu, 2015). Towards the late 20th century, newer generations of artists began questioning the foundational assumptions of modernism, by way of introducing postmodernist strategies that reflect the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society, drawing upon global postmodern idioms while supporting their work with local histories, politics, and cultural references. Kainebi Osahenye, Ngozi Schommers, and Victor Ehikhamenor are some of new generation artists of the 21st century that exemplify a turn toward visual hybridity (conceptual layering, cultural critique, and fragmented narratives) approaches that is quite distinct from earlier modernist ideals (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2016; Adeleke, 2021). This evolution matches broader trends in African art, where artists negotiate international discourses while asserting indigenous views in a postcolonial, globalized context (Kasfir & Forster, 2020).

These artists began to question the assumptions embedded in national iconography and formal purity, interrogate inherited visual codes and forging instead a heterogeneous visual language attuned to fragmentation, irony, multiplicity, and conceptual play. They rejected grand narratives, embraced cultural hybridity, and the valorisation of surface over depth became evident in their work. Yet they simply did not borrow these strategies from Euro-American postmodernism but instead are influenced by specific historical conditions of Nigeria's postcolonial trajectory - military rule, economic restructuring, urban alienation, religious multiplicity, and gendered inequalities - contexts that overwhelmingly shape the content and form of contemporary painting. Artists traverse multiple epistemological systems at once by way of collapsing binaries of tradition and modernity, sacred and secular, indigenous and cosmopolitan. Their practices emerge from a pattern in which Western post-structural theory, African oral cosmologies, digital technologies, and lived social histories all merge into shifting, entangled expressions. Okwui Enwezor (2016) and Chika Okeke-Agulu (2015) contend that African contemporary art needs to be read through frameworks that were focussed on local specificities and global entanglements, while eschewing both ethnographic essentialism and formalist universalism. The artists under discussion here do not simply represent

postmodernism; they transform it, inscribing it with indigenous sensibilities, and decolonial critiques that fundamentally revise its delineations. Their works are sites of epistemic re-constitutions, wherein history, identity, and memory are not merely represented but positively contested and reformulated. They are sites of negotiation between past and present, concept and form, visibility and erasure. The artists thus destabilize the essentialized image of Africanness, staging identity as mutable, performative, and mediated.

With these interventions, Nigerian painting is part of a broader postmodern state that not only resists singularity, foregrounds contradiction, but calls for new interpretive models based in both critique and contextual sensitivity. This visual and discursive complexity indicates the need for an extension of Nigerian art history beyond modernism's legacy. By doing this, it opens the discipline to more subtle conceptions of aesthetic production that are attentive to multiplicity, contingency, and the politics of representation developing a more dialogic and decolonial way to contemporary African art.

Based on Lyotard's opposition to meta-narratives (Lyotard, 1984) and Jameson's cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1991), postmodern theory has long shaped understandings of artistic fragmentation, imitation, and irony. Although these frameworks emerged in Western discourses, their application to Nigerian art needs to take local histories and vocabularies (Enwezor, 2016; Okeke-Agulu, 2015). Critics such as Okeke-Agulu (2015) highlight how the modernist traditions of the Nsukka School have developed: modern artists now feature conceptual breaks, diverse installation practices, and performative staging into their paintings, indicating a shift from pure formalism to hybrid modes that resonate with postmodern aesthetics.

Scholarly discussion has approached Nigerian art from a modernist perspective, commonly overlooking how painting has been a place of postmodern critique despite this generational change. Works by Okeke, Ehikhamenor, Schommers and Osahenye, and their peers point to a greater movement, one that brings together material hybridity, fragmented narrative, affective resonance, and political reflection. These artists question visual conventions and art historiography itself, toward a more varied perception of Nigerian painting, one which is in tandem with international postmodernism and remaining deeply contextual and rooted in local narratives.

Postmodern Characteristics in Nigerian Painting: Theoretical Frames and Artistic Practice

In Nigerian painting, postmodernism portrays a resistance to stable narratives, homogenous cultural identities, and Eurocentric aesthetic values. Instead, artists use fragmentation, imitation, irony, and hybridity to resonate with the complexity of post-colonial realities. (Okeke-Agulu, 2015; Enwezor, 2009). These strategies are not merely stylistic exercises but deeply ingrained cultural reactions. The following analysis are in Homi Bhabha's hybridity, Roland Barthes' intertextuality, Jean Baudrillard's simulacra and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theoretical frameworks.

Irony and Intertextuality

Theoretical Frame: Barthes' Intertextuality

Uche Okeke's later paintings revisit the Uli and Nsibidi visual traditions that he facilitated and modernized, however, from the 1990s onwards, he derived these forms not as fixed cultural symbols, but as variable signs, part of an intertextual living archive. Roland Barthes' (1977) intertextuality theory accounts for how these allusions function as layered citations in a broader context of cultural and historical narratives. Such a technique challenges essentialist interpretation and posits a dynamic, changing African modernity (Ogbechie, 2008). His works often dialogue with historical references, creating layers of intertextuality that challenge the idea of an 'authentic' African aesthetic. Uche Okeke (1933–2016), being one of the founding members of the Zaria Art Society also called the Zaria Rebels, is a central figure in contemporary Nigerian art and a foremost protagonist of the postindependence artistic renaissance. He championed a new kind of artistic pedagogy and practice in Nigeria that would transcend colonial academic realism in what he referred to as “*natural synthesis*” - an idea that artists should combine indigenous African visual traditions with modern techniques and ideas to create a truly Nigerian modernism. Vital to Okeke's visual language was the use of *Uli* - a traditional Igbo linear art form historically practiced by women on walls and bodies. He studied and adapted its graceful lines, symbols, and spiritual reverberations into a personal modernist style. This is visible in works such as *Ana Mmuo* (Land of the Spirits, 1961), where Uli-inspired forms are used to evoke metaphysical themes and Igbo cosmology. His compositions often feature abstracted human and mythological figures, dynamic linework, and a strong rhythmic quality.

Uche Okeke's *Ana Mmuo* (meaning “Land of Spirits” in Igbo) is a seminal painting that exemplifies the synthesis of indigenous aesthetics with modernist abstraction, and it becomes particularly revealing when examined through Roland Barthes' theory of intertextuality. Barthes, particularly in his essay *The Death of the Author* (1967), argued that the meaning of a text is not fixed by its author, but is shaped by an endless web of cultural, historical, and linguistic references. Every text (or artwork) is thus a “tissue of quotations” drawn from multiple sources.

Ana Mmuo features a dense, layered composition of stylized, almost calligraphic black line figures drawn over a background of saturated red, ochre, and white. The abstract forms also evoke ancestral spirits or masquerades (*mmuo*), central to Igbo cosmology and ritual. In this way, Okeke does not merely represent a literal spirit world; rather, he weaves together multiple cultural “texts” such as Igbo cosmology (notions of ancestors, the spiritual realm), Uli aesthetics (indigenous female visual language), European modernism (abstract expressionism and primitivism) and Postcolonial nationalism (advocating cultural revival through the Zaria Art Society's “natural synthesis”).



Plate I: Uche Okeke, *Ana Mmuo*, 1961. Oil on board. 36.2



Plate II: Uche Okeke, *The Oracle of Gwong*, 1961. Lino cut, 5.9 x 3.9 inches.
Source: <https://www.bonhams.com>

Barthes' intertextuality posits that the meaning of a work arises from its relation to other texts. *Ana Mmuo* is therefore not a self-contained image but a network of references:

- i. **Igbo Ritual and Oral Culture:** The idea of spirits (*mmuo*) emerges from traditional Igbo religion itself and passed down orally and visually through performances, storytelling, and body art. Okeke visually “quotes” these ideas, not by mimicking them, but by translating them into a modern visual idiom.
- ii. **Colonial and Western Art Discourse:** The formal abstraction in *Ana Mmuo* dialogues with mid-century modernism, particularly the works of Picasso, Paul Klee, and Joan Miró. However, where European modernists borrowed from African forms to invent “primitivism,” Okeke reclaims those forms from within, reversing the colonial gaze.
- iii. **Zaria Art Society Ideology:** Okeke's participation in the Zaria Art Society in the 1950s espoused the philosophy of Natural Synthesis - merging indigenous content with Western techniques. The painting becomes an intertextual product of this ideology, referencing colonial education and indigenous resistance at once.

Barthes' theory also decentralizes the author, empowering the viewer as co-creator of meaning. In this light, *Ana Mmuo* can be seen as a mythic allegory, if read by someone familiar with Igbo spiritual culture, a postcolonial manifesto, for viewers attuned to Nigeria's early independence period and debates on cultural identity and an aesthetic puzzle, to those trained in modernist abstraction and line drawing. Each reading is valid; none is final. The painting's meaning is not fixed but constantly reconstituted in dialogue with other “texts” in the viewer's mind. In *Ana Mmuo*, Uche Okeke becomes a cultural scribe - translating, appropriating, and reconfiguring multiple visual languages. Through Barthes' intertextual perspective, the work transcends individual authorship and becomes a palimpsest of historical memory, indigenous tradition, and global art discourse. It is not just about spirits; it is about the spirit of texts in motion. Okeke, in addition to his practice as an artist, was a major cultural theorist, educator, and champion in Nigerian art history.

While serving as the head of the Fine Arts Department at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he groomed a generation of artists such as Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui who extended his vision of indigenous modernism. His work is a cornerstone in the history of African modern art with a focus on cultural continuity, aesthetic innovation, and intellectual autonomy that provided the foundation for a decolonized artistic identity in Nigeria and throughout Africa (Adeeko, 2016).

Cultural Hybridity

Theoretical Frame: Bhabha's Hybridity

Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity provides a critical framework for interpreting postmodern strategies in Nigerian painting. Central to his concept is the "third space" where cultural meaning is negotiated and redefined, making it ideal for examining how Nigerian artists resist fixed narratives and Eurocentric aesthetics. The study's core variables - fragmentation, appropriation, irony, and the rejection of homogenous identities are effectively illuminated by hybridity, which emphasizes the creative interplay between indigenous traditions and colonial/postcolonial influences. The artists under study such as exemplify this hybridity by blending diverse visual languages, symbolic references, and techniques. Their works subvert dominant canons through layered forms and cultural fusion, reflecting Nigeria's complex postcolonial identity. Thus, Bhabha's hybridity not only explains the artists' aesthetic choices but also supports the study's broader aim of highlighting postmodern resistance and negotiation in contemporary Nigerian painting.

In Nigerian painting today, hybridity tends to emerge from the negotiation between international modernist forms and indigenous symbols. Kainebi Osahenye, for example, combines expressive abstraction with Nigerian social and spiritual iconography thus falling in line with Homi Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity, or the "third space" in which cultural meaning is produced through difference rather than identity. Osahenye's use of materials like found objects, and allusions to consumption and urban rot, characterize a hybrid aesthetic that is both local and cosmopolitan (Forster, 2013).

Postmodern Nigerian painting depicts a critical visual vocabulary that is spontaneous, multi-layered, and culturally interwoven and reflects a growing trend toward interdisciplinary approaches that merge indigenous knowledge, modernist aesthetics, experimentation with materials, and political critique. As one of the foremost artists of modern Nigerian art Kainebi Osahenye's artwork delves into themes of consumerism, environmental degradation, spirituality, and post-colonial identity via experimental materiality and expressive abstraction. Born in Lagos and educated at the Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH) and the Auchi Polytechnic, Osahenye's practice spans painting, sculpture, and installation, frequently dissolving boundaries between media. The enduring fascination with change through accumulation is the essence of Osahenye's artistic language, His work frequently uses found and recycled objects like soft drink cans, newspapers, charred wood, metal debris which are combined into thick, layered compositions.

This method shows both environmental awareness and a critique of Nigeria's culture of waste due to overconsumption. In paintings like *Portraits II* (2010), a space full of crumpled cans fashioned into a human head, Osahenye presents an alarming metaphor for collective trauma, memory, and mortality.



Plate III: Kainebe Osahenye, *Portrait II*, 2010. 48 x 48 inches. Mixed media on board.

Source: <https://www.mutualart.com>

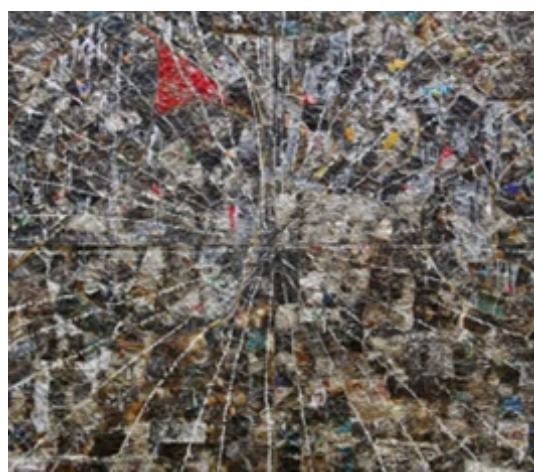


Plate IV: Kainebe Osahenye, *Interactions of body and spirit*, 2011. Mixed media on board. 60 inches x 67.9 inches.

Source: <https://www.mutualart.com>

Kainebe Osahenye's *Portrait II* (Plate III) is a challenging piece that addresses concerns of materiality, identity, and postcolonial fragmentation. The artist employs a synthesis of found materials such as flattened soda and beer cans to create a textured sculptural-like surface that comprises the outline of a human head. The wild but calculated layering of industrial refuse with painted surfaces defy traditional portraiture, and in doing so provides a critical contemplation of contemporary African subjectivity. This work can be intensely analysed through Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity theory, which highlights cultural mixing, mimicry, and identity formation in postcolonial settings.

Bhabha theorizes hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (1994), as the cultural state that arises from colonial encounters, a "third space" in which new identities are negotiated rather than inherited or imposed. Hybridity is all about ambivalence, contradiction, and rupture that results from cross-cultural contact and not just about blending in a harmonious way.

Applying Hybridity to Osahenye's *Portrait II*

Material Hybridity – Waste as Medium

Kainebe Osahenye's use of discarded aluminium soda and beer cans is a compelling metaphor for cultural consumption and residue.

These materials speak to:

- i. **Consumerism and globalization** - specifically in post-colonial African cities where Western products dominate local markets.

- ii. **Ecological and cultural pollution** - where material and ideological waste of the West is both absorbed and re-purposed.
- iii. **Assemblage as resistance** - reclaiming the debris of society to produce a new visual language.

This literal and symbolic blend of various media produces a material hybridity that reflects the fractured identity of the post-colonial subject.

Identity as a “Third Space”

Kainebe Osahenye's *Portrait II* (Plate III) dwells in Bhabha's third space and resists essentialist notions of identity (African, Western, modern, traditional) where identities are continually constructed and deconstructed. The head seems both colossal and fragmented, thus invoking a figure caught between worlds perhaps African, perhaps urban, possibly both. This liminal state reflects Bhabha's idea that the postcolonial subject negotiates identity in contradiction and not in purity but in Osahenye does not offer a resolved, noble portrait. Instead, he creates a contested terrain of subjectivity.

Mimicry and Re-signification

Bhabha also theorized mimicry as a double-edged form of postcolonial imitation that both resembles and disturbs the colonizer's culture. In *Portrait II*, one can trace this using Western consumer products such as soda and beer brands - objects of colonial legacy and capitalist desire which are reworked into icons of African self-expression. Osahenye mimics the waste of the West, turning it into the material of postcolonial critique rather than mimicking Western portraiture in oil or pencil. The result is a form of mockery and re-signification - a hybrid aesthetic that critiques the sources of its own materials.

Osahenye's art is also heavily informed by metaphysical and spiritual symbolism. His paintings, which are mostly large-scale are often heavily textured, employ gestural marks, recurring motifs, and radiant colour fields to evoke spiritual and emotional states. The tension between figuration and abstraction within these works addresses the dichotomies of profane and sacred, personal and collective, local and universal. His employment of circular shapes, spirals, and mandala-like structures also calls upon classic African cosmology, linking his work to the spiritual systems that precede and defy colonial epistemologies. Scholars and critics have situated Osahenye's practice in the context of postmodern hybridity, as it has been theorized by scholars like Homi Bhabha. His art negotiates the "third space" of cultural production, wherein indigenous materials and conceptual strategies interconnect with international contemporary aesthetics. As Forster (2013) has noted, Osahenye's installations are frequently "material metaphors" for the social and natural facts of urban Nigerian life.

Pastiche and Parody

Theoretical Frame: Baudrillard's Simulacra & Jameson's Pastiche

Victor Ehikhamenor's practice is a good illustration of Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulacra which are visual representations that replicate and replace original referents. His incorporation of Catholic imagery with traditional Edo and Bini symbolism, executed in rich,

ornamental patterns, produces artworks that evoke sacred altars while also parodying their ideological baggage. Fredric Jameson's (1991) concept of pastiche as "blank parody" is well-suited to describe his works, which not only enact reverence and critique in the same gesture but also reclaims visual traditions suppressed under colonial and religious regimes while refusing to return to a naive authenticity (Okeke-Agulu, 2015).



Plate V: Victor Ehikhamenor, *Pope XII In Benin Kingdom*, 2021. rosary beads, thread and gemstones on lace textile approximate size: 70.8 x 39.3 x 39.3 inches.

Source: <https://thelagosreview.ng>



Plate VI: Victor Ehikhamenor, *Umogun I*, 2024. Rosary, coral beads, and thread with bronze statuette on lace textile 67 x 45.9 x 2.7 inches.

Source: <https://thelagosreview.ng>

In Victor Ehikhamenor's *Pope XII in Benin Kingdom* (2021) is a powerful postmodern work of art that combines material experimentation with multi-layered cultural critique. Made from rosary beads, gemstones, thread, and lace fabric, the piece recalls the outline of a robed church figure while also alluding to the regalia of Benin kingship. The work measures around 70.8 x 39.3 x 39.3 inches, its shape draped in undulating fabric that veers between reverence and irony. Thematically, this piece is an instance of *pastiche*, a postmodern feature described by Linda Hutcheon (2002) as the imitation of various styles without a hierarchical basis. In this instance, Ehikhamenor incorporates Catholic iconography with local materials and forms, studiously refusing to place one above the other. The use of rosary beads - a powerful symbol of Christian piety - overlaid on lace, a material used both in ecclesiastical regalia and Nigerian ceremonial dress, produces a hybrid form that resists unitary interpretation. This art's layering is both an homage and a subversion, questioning the historical hegemony of Western religion while celebrating the richness of indigenous presence. The parody element is equally significant, which Hutcheon (2002) distinguishes from ridicule by its potential for both critical distance and love. The titular invocation of "Pope XII" embedded in the "Benin Kingdom" scenario enacts a conceptual reversal: it satirizes the colonial complicity of church and empire, acting out a fictional confluence in which the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church is symbolically installed in African royal space. This reversal unsettles the dominance of Western

religious and cultural metanarratives and regains representational agency for African kingship and spirituality.

Furthermore, as Chika Okeke-Agulu (2015) argues in *Postcolonial Modernism*, post-independence Nigerian artists have often engaged in aesthetic "entanglement," whereby modern forms are infused with indigenous logic. Ehikhamenor's piece exemplifies this entanglement by employing contemporary art strategies (assemblage, conceptual titling) within a deeply rooted symbolic and historical framework. The work's opacity and cultural hybridity position it squarely within the postmodern condition, what Appiah (2018) terms the "cosmopolitan contamination" of cultural identities. Ultimately, *Pope XII in Benin Kingdom* is less a critique of faith and more a reassertion of cultural complexity. It embodies the postmodern tendencies of fragmentation, hybridity, and re-inscription of meaning, inviting viewers to consider how colonial legacies are not only remembered but also artistically rewritten.

Deconstruction of Narrative

Theoretical Frame: Derrida's Deconstruction

Ngozi Schommers deploys strategies of fragmentation and layering that resonate with Derrida's (1978) *deconstruction* in her art. Her pointillist technique and collage-like arrangements break from linear visual storytelling, evoking memory, trauma, and identity as unstable constructs. In the work titled '*The One Who Saw Me*' (2018), she defies the rigidity often imposed by patriarchal or colonial visual traditions. In turn, her works demand that the viewer reconstructs meaning actively, encapsulating what Derrida describes as 'différance', or the infinite deferral of meaning. This reading is in keeping with current discourse around African women's art as a site for re-inscription and resistance (Okeke-Agulu & Enwezor, 2009). Ngozi Schommers's *The One Who Saw Me* (2018) employs an unusual range of materials - sequins, graphite, acrylic marker, and perforated handmade watercolour paper to create a visual narrative at once intimate and destabilizing. The work depicts two children, part-realized through pointillist aggregations of sequins and set afloat in a white space, punctuated by voids and flora motifs. Such deliberate visual fragmentation presents itself as an exemplar of postmodern narratorial deconstruction in keeping with Derrida's notion of disrupting fixed meanings and linear representations (Derrida, 1976/2016). Rather than presenting a cohesive portrait or narrative, Schommers crafts a multi-layered surface in which absence is invested with meaning equal to presence. One of the children is only partially realized, vacant areas bisecting their face and body - an intervention against normative portraiture. As argued by Enwezor (2016), many contemporary African artists deploy tactics of rupture and incompleteness to challenge current aesthetic norms and postcolonial expectations around "authentic" African expression. Schommers's work is consonant with this approach, deploying ornamentation (sequins, floral overlays) as a subversive material tactic that blurs the difference between surface and depth, beauty and critique. The perforated paper, a repeated motif in her practice, further literalizes gaps in the narrative, inviting viewers to reckon with what is left unsaid or invisible. As Njami (2018) observes, contemporary African artists often question the very act of representation itself, rejecting the notion of total visibility and choosing instead to foreground partiality, multiplicity, and ambiguity.

From a Derridean perspective, Schommers's work engages with the concept of **différance**, where meaning is always deferred and constructed through difference. The visual tension between the childlike subject matter and the formal disjunction of the surface illustrates how identity, memory, and childhood can no longer be read as fixed categories. Instead, they are open to reinterpretation, rupture, and multiplicity, key postmodernist themes in Nigerian art today (Okeke-Agulu, 2015; Odita, 2021).

Moreover, Schommers challenges the hierarchy of “fine” materials by focusing on sequins and craft-based media often associated with domesticity and femininity. This echoes broader feminist interventions within postmodern practice that question the exclusion of decorative forms from critical discourse (Wallen, 2021). In doing so, *The One Who Saw Me* (2018) becomes both a site of memory and a critique of representation, where beauty is complicated by fragmentation, and identity emerges through visual deconstruction.



Plate VI: Ngozi Schommers, *The one who saw me*, 2018. Sequin, graphite, acrylic marker, and perforated paper on handmade watercolor paper, 28 7/10 x 44 9/10 inches.

Source: <https://www.artsy.net>



Plate VII: Ngozi Schommers, *Ohere*, 2020. Perforated paper, confetti on handmade paper. 26 x 34 3/10 inches.

Source: <https://www.artsy.net>

The interdisciplinary practices of Uche Okeke, Victor Ehikhamenor, Ngozi Schommers and Kainebe Osahenye demonstrate that contemporary Nigerian art is deeply embedded in both local traditions and global critique. They employ diverse media to produce pieces that are not just aesthetically pleasing but also conceptually rich. Apparent in their practices is a synthesis of ecology, spirituality, feminism, and politics into multi-layered aesthetic experiences thereby expressing a characteristically Nigerian contribution to global contemporary art. This demonstrate that postmodernism in Nigerian painting goes beyond the idea of passive imitation of Western artistic movements. It instead constitutes a strategic, localized engagement with key postmodern themes such as fragmentation, multiplicity, and identity politics, recontextualized in the complicated postcolonial realities. The Nigerian artists have not merely followed postmodern forms; they have transmuted them to question the ideological contradictions inherent in both colonial and nationalist aesthetic systems. Central to such a transformation is the consideration of colonial aesthetics, especially the Eurocentric

formalism and anthropological gaze that historically positioned African art as either "primitive" or "ethnographic." By imitation, appropriation, and abstraction, postmodern Nigerian artists deconstruct such hegemonic visual codes. For example, Uche Okeke's *Ana Mmuo* (1961) engages in a visual deconstruction of Western modernist abstraction by way of inserting Igbo religious and artistic traditions, especially Uli line motifs, into a modernist visual vocabulary.

Postmodern Nigerian painting also critiques the nationalist-modernist canon of the post-independence period. This previous canon, as exemplified in the Zaria Art Society, was preoccupied with creating a single cultural identity by "natural synthesis," numerous postmodern artists question the assumptions of cultural purity and underlying unity. For example, Kainebe Osahenye's *Portrait II* (2010), undermines the idealized postcolonial subject by creating a fractured, textured human head out of pulverized aluminium cans, wastes of urban consumerism and global capitalism. Through this action, Osahenye redefines portraiture and identity itself as unstable, hybrid, and materially conditioned by global flows. His work disrupts both Western and nationalist discourses of coherence and identity.

Ngozi Schommers's practice blends craft-based processes with conceptual strategies, drawing from personal and collective histories to question how African women are represented and remembered. Schommers often employs layering, fragmentation, and decorative symbolism to challenge dominant narratives and highlight marginalized perspectives. Her art is rooted in feminist and postcolonial discourse, using visual complexity to invite reflection on beauty, vulnerability, and the power of storytelling through form and texture.

Victor Ehikhamenor bridges traditional aesthetics with contemporary political and spiritual commentary. Deeply influenced by his Edo heritage, Catholic upbringing, and the visual language of indigenous shrines and textile patterns, his work combines motifs from local folklore, religious iconography, and colonial history. He often uses unconventional materials such as rosary beads, lace, thread, and pigment to create immersive installations and densely patterned compositions that blur the lines between painting, sculpture, and writing. His art engages with themes of cultural memory, hybridity, postcolonial critique, and the interplay between the sacred and the secular, positioning him as a prominent voice in contemporary African art and global postmodernism.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore how contemporary Nigerian painters adopt postmodernist aesthetic such as fragmentation, irony, hybridity, and cultural deconstruction to challenge inherited narratives, colonial legacies, and fixed conceptions of identity. Through the postmodernism perspective, the study examined how selected artists reconfigure traditional symbols, materials, and techniques to reflect the complexities of contemporary Nigerian experience.

The findings demonstrate that Nigerian postmodern painting is not merely an aesthetic movement but a critical strategy for negotiating history, memory, and identity. Artists like

Victor Ehikhamenor, Ngozi Schommers, and Kainebe Osahenye exemplify how postmodern visual languages can serve as tools of resistance, self-reinvention, and cultural critique. Their works disrupt linear art histories and embrace multiplicity, offering alternative ways of seeing and interpreting Nigerian realities.

The study contributes to the growing discourse on African postmodernisms by situating Nigerian painting within global contemporary practices while emphasizing its localized philosophical and political relevance. The engagement with postmodernist forms in Nigerian art reveals a dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, the personal and the political, the local and the global. Ultimately, this paper confirms that postmodernism is present and growing in Nigerian painting, not as an imported aesthetic but as a dynamic, context-sensitive mode of expression. Far from replicating Western trends, they use postmodernism to express disillusionment with prevailing ideologies, to explore fluid and multiple identities, and to reclaim indigenous forms within new visual frameworks.

It is easily perceived that Nigerian postmodernism is heavily invested in cultural reappropriation and critique as seen in the works of artists such as Uche Okeke, Victor Ehikhamenor, Ngozi Schommers and Kainebe Osahenye. These artists disrupt both colonial visual inheritances and nationalist modernist canons, proposing instead diverse, non-linear, and heterogeneous visual languages that more represent contemporary Nigerian realities. This requires more inclusive and decentralized narrative of Nigerian art history, one that acknowledges postmodernism not as a rupture, but as an extension of previous impulses to negotiate identity, politics, and aesthetics. Future research should expand this discussion far beyond painting to encompass sculpture, digital art, installation, and performance - areas in which postmodern practices are also flourishing, and where artists persist in redefining what it is to create and to critique within a postcolonial world.

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