

## **Revisiting Realism for the Study of Indigenous Occupation in Awka**

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### **Abstract**

Painting goes beyond objective expression of the subject, which involves enlightening the viewer on the features, nature and any other factor that identify with realistic or naturalistic representation of the subject only. In this context, with reference to indigenous occupation in Awka, this study aims at extending the frontier of visual representation to that which expresses the subject beyond its literal or conventional interpretation. Hence the quest to transform the genre imagery from one built on superficial knowledge and understanding to that which is subliminal. For vivid and effective communication of the content, realistic style of painting is employed as the ideal medium for the expression because it poses no problem to the viewer's intellectual and aesthetic appraisal of visual experience. Furthermore, its fusion with futuristic elements seeks expression in the curiosity and imaginative response of the viewer. Generally the contents of the imageries focus on the aim to trigger and configure the imaginations of the viewer to align with the ideas and principles the subject connotes or conveys. The relevant materials for the study are sourced from textbooks, journals, internet and studio experience. Related literatures are reviewed and the outcome of the results forms the basis for the execution of the study. Analysis of the imageries reveals a studio experience whereby the subject finds expression in the evolution of human intellect. However, this study tends to offer the spectator an insightful knowledge of indigenous occupation as a reality and as a concept. Recommendation are: that indigenous occupation should be studied and interpreted based on metaphysical values. It should be studied and interpreted with reference to colour language. Further futuristic traditional painting of the subject should aim at reflecting man's quest for interplanetary colonization.

### **Introduction**

One can argue that in the course of the evolution of human cognitive and normative faculties, visual perception among others, is the primal mode of sensing tangible contents of the world around humans. Archeologists and anthropologists tend to suggest that humans exhibited interactive tendencies as far back as pre-paleolithic era. However, "it seems clear that the early hominids like other primates were social beings" (R. Ember, E. Ember and peregrine 2008:108). Besides, this interaction cannot be limited to their specie only, but also extends to the world around them. Therefore this mode of interation, especially the visual aspect, was instrument to their interpretation of their world. This interpretations seem to reflect the mode of critical and analytical processing of the experienced reality. Painting, a two dimensional recreation of reality also stands as an extension of this visual reality. Besides painting

with interpretative and definitive contents can describe and concretize the intangible as well. Therefore it can be used to enlighten one on a subject, to the level that transcends mundane understanding.

Typically, most paintings with themes that bother on indigenous occupation often appear colourful and expressively rendered. On the contrary, the subject figure of the paintings seems to contradict the beauty, serenity and richness of the background of the composition. For example, the farmer or the blacksmith is often rendered in his pre-colonial era appearance. Although this rendition may serve the purpose of preserving and establishing the cultural heritage of the people, it could as well tell a different story in the current era. The subject could be misconstrued as that which connotes backwardness, among others.

Every picture tells a story. This popular maxim points towards the basic concept oriented criteria and principles that are fundamental to the making of a fulfilled painting. In essence, it is of utmost importance to adopt the imagery that captures and idealizes the subject and the idea it represents. This application accords the viewer some insights into the substance of the subject - like in the case of indigenous occupation. Furthermore, the infusion of the futuristic elements into the imagery is for the evocation of imaginative cum critical thinking in the viewer. This is based on the fact that the function of art [painting] and its appreciation is not subject to aesthetics and graphics representation alone – it tends to express, communicates, as well stimulates the senses manifests ideas and affects emotions (C. Ember, M. Ember and Peregrine, 2002)

The choice of comprehensively rendered futuristic traditional painting for expressing the subject serves to accord the viewer a smooth access to its identity, as well as the idea it connotes. Hodin (1972), observes, in his words that “what strike us is that traditional art does not put any difficulties in the way of our understanding. It speaks directly to our senses, and through them to our mind”. (P. 124). Thus, the content of the imagery is focused on reflecting or capturing the subject in a representation that identifies with the standards and ideals of modernity. Hence, the researcher’s quest for iconic depiction that is on par with the present, and as well, serves as a projection into the future.

In most cases, the realists’ painting of genre scenes involving indigenous occupation, in all their beauty and attractiveness, seem to lack the subject that conveys the essence of good. For example, the image of the farmer usually spell wretchedness, ignorance, backwardness and so on. To a large extent, this mode of practice conceals the ultimate purpose of highlighting the specificity intended for and expected of a painting to ideally represent the subject. However, this research attempts to re-position certain occupations that were formally denigrated through genre scenes.

The work focuses on the realistic study of indigenous occupation based on historical and philosophical values, thereby projecting the ideas surrounding the interpretation of the subject as a key factor for transcending mundane understanding of its visual representation as mere decoration.

### **Review of Related Literature**

“Concept is a mental category we have formed to group objects, events or situations that share similar gestures or characteristics (D. Hockenbury and S.

Hockenbury 2003, p.283). The making of “indigenous occupation” as a subjective genre painting, is built on the concepts namely historical concept, cultural concept and philosophical concept.

**Historical Concept:** In the course of human history, indigenous occupation marks human evolution from a bipedalistic hominid to a homo sapien. For instance the advent of farming marks human realization of the ability to settle down and be in control of other creations around them rather than living the life of gatherers and wanderers.

**Cultural Concept:** This engagement also serve as a measure of one’s affluence or importance in Igbo cultural settings generally. Apart from this economic value, it also represent human strength in perseverance and persistence.

**Philosophical concept:** Indigenous occupation spells the ability of humans to explore, harness and remold their world. It also symbolizes actualization of their position as the controller and the remake of the world. Furthermore it marks humans giant leap into the extension of these feats to spheres limitless bound.

### **Concept of Realism**

It is not all about producing a picture that best defines the subject literally alone, but that which is also made on the platform of empirical subjectivity. This realistic approach achieves the depiction of reality based on the artist’s extrasensory perception. Moreover, as a radical address to present experience, realism in this context seems to be in association with modernity and modernism. The reality depicted in Paul Cézanne’s paintings of the post impressionistic era, for instance, is not simply object oriented but it is the real as sensed and lived. Pendeville (2000) attests to this: “... in Cézanne’s, what holds the world together is seen to be perception itself, since the juxtaposed touches of paint represent not merely things out there in an external world but what Cézanne termed sensations ... “ in this context, reality of the subject lies on the principle that defines and explains the configuration of the reality.

### **Concept of Futurism**

Futurism is a style that revolves around the artistic expression of motion, simultaneity and metamorphoses of vision itself. Futuristic rendition is synonymous with dynamism, advancement and change, which characterize existence. It is a confrontational approach to existential stagnancy. In his manifesto, the originator of futurism, “Marinetti called for an area that would champion aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racers stride ... the pinch and slap.” He had discovered he wrote “a new beauty; the beauty of speed...” (Sayre 2004, p.502) Likewise, Arnason and Prather (1998) described Futurism as a style, movements and revolutionary endeavor that establishes empathy between the spectator and the painting.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Clark (1976:20): “...the romantics said that art should excite the emotions, and in a particular the emotion of fear, which was the source of the sublime”.

In this context, the idea behind the projection of the subject is founded on the concept of the supremacy of emotion over reason. In essence, a painter can use his art to influence the spectator's response and conduct, by expressing the emotions about the subject. Furthermore, the concept of reality is manifested in the context of the idea that man possesses the power of volition.

### **Realism**

Beau jean (2005:18), defined realism thus: "in art, realism means artistic representation that imitates reality or tallies with reality" Realistic art tends to reproduce and recreate the phenomena of everyday as it finds it – through the depiction of subject matter sincerely without artificiality, avoiding artistic conventions and supernatural elements.

"About the middle of the nineteenth century, the most important younger painters began to look about for means of avoiding romantic flights of imagination and the academic glorification of heroic past" (Fleming 1963:674). Their concerns were very much rooted in the present. One of the leaders of the group who later styled themselves realists was Gustave Courbet (1819 - 1877). He consciously set out to produce an art on common place. The stone Breakers (1849), his painting of two figures in tattered and ripped clothing trying hard to break and remove stone from the road – because of the prime outcome of the quest. Realism has been common in arts of many periods. Most nineteenth century artists, the romantics and neo - classists as well – like their naturalists and realist's counterparts – demand for their work, a particularly close engagement with reality. Although their idea of "real" differed, the interpretation of it generally found expression in truth – a matter of significance, not mere likeness.

Based on the idea that the physical world did not define the whole of reality, but serves as the outward expression or manifestation of compelling energy and order, the artist's close study of visual phenomena aimed as discovering this core of reality. Therefore through rendering the tangible forms of nature with sincerity, artists tried hard to create sense of the invisible. In this light Eitner (1992) states that the realists inclination in art as in science was provoked was prompted by secular piety, and, by the search for an all-encompassing order registered, within which mankind would find its position. In this context the designed truth to nature rendition was not merely on aesthetic grounds, but serves as the necessary pre-requisite of meaning.

### **Social Realism**

According to Geldzahler (1965): "The painters' desire to communicate the impatience with the social and economic structure of the world gave rise to the term social realism ..." It is social because the painting identified with the problems of society ; realism owing to the literal nature of the technique – which makes the meaning and the artists specific feelings clear to all.

Both realists and social realists had one thing in common: They produce paintings that were concerned with the present and not the past. On the other hand social realism differs by inclination of mood, as reflected by Jack Levine an American social realist in his comment about his work: "I took my place in the late thirties as part of the general uprising of social consciousness in art and literature... we had a feeling

of confidence about our ability to do something about the world” (Geldzahler, 1965:112).

### **Illusionistic Realism**

As the name implies, illusionistic realism refers to the realistic painting that exhibits three dimensionality on a two dimensional surfaces. This phenomenon finds expression in the accurate rendition of perspective, life forms and the details of light and colour. Perspective is defined, according to Beckett, (1994) thus: “Put very simply, the art of perspective is the representation of solid objects and three dimensional spaces in accordance with our optical perception of these – and in direct opposition to a purely symbolic or decorative form of representation)”p.88. Naturally, we observe the world “in perspective”: objects appear reduced in size as they recede into the distance, electric poles along the road or avenue trees, for instance, appear to converge as they stretch into the distance. Thus, the laws of perspective are built upon these converging lines intersecting eventually at a single point (vanishing point).

Linear perspective was first demonstrated as an element in architectural design in 1413 by Brunelleschi, the architect who built Florence Cathedrals’ revolutionary dome (completed in 1418) “However, it was Leon Battista Alberti (1404 - 1472) who pioneered its application to painting. His 1435 treatise on painting had a widespread influence on contemporary artists”. (Beckett, 1994:89)

### **Review of related Paintings**

Arts are of intense importance and of intellectually deep concern to most men. It had been in existence in every known civilization; accompany man’s steps from his prehistoric dawn – prior to the birth of language. Going back in time (prehistoric era) when the artist was not referred to as an artist, but produced works of art, those works then were not only produced based on aesthetic values only, but on metaphysical values also. For instance, the naturalistic animal drawings of the old stone age man was made by hunters whose major aim – as proposed by scholars – was magic and their main purpose was to provide food. The animal expressed as pierced by spears and arrows on the dark cave walls was considered to be already killed before it was even hunted. On the other hand, some other scholars have argued that the motive behind the magic oriented paintings was not to facilitate the killing of bison with other species, but believed the prehistoric painters created beast paintings to make certain the survival of the herds on which they depended on for their food and for their clothing. Moreover, these propositions were arrived at, after their experiencing the difficulty and remoteness of access of many of the images, and the indication of centuries of usage.

However, this remoteness among others may not be convincing enough to suggest that prehistoric hunters attributed magical properties to the animal images they painted. In the first place, it is worthy to discuss the basic concepts of magic in the course of analyzing those assertions. In the first place Frazer (1996) opined:

If we analyse the principles of thought on which magic is based ...: first, that like produces like,..., and second, that things which have once been in contact with each other

contrive to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed, (1996:21)

The former principle (law of similarity) attests to the idea that the magician concludes that he can achieve any effect he desires merely by imitating it; from the latter (law of contact), he concludes that whatever he inflicts on a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was in contact, whether it formed part of the body or not. From this analysis, one could deduce that the latter principle (law of contact) would apply, should magical purposes were to be actually intended. But in the case of Paleolithic paintings, the content suggests purely representational depiction, never without meanings attached to the paintings. Furthermore, there is no record of trace of, or remains of any substance or material whether organic or otherwise that may be identified with the beasts, with reference to contact by habitation or consumption among others. Therefore the question of magical attributes attached to the painting is disputable. To buttress this argument, Kleiner (2009) reporting about this proposition states: "A central problem for both the hunting - magic and food - creation theories is that the animals that seem to have diet staples of old stone Age peoples are not those frequently portrayed . For example, faunal remains show that the Altamirans ate red deer not bison"(p.21).

However, the argument for or against magic as the major purpose behind the making of prehistoric painting does not rule out the fact that the paintings did have some meaning to the Paleolithic people who made and appreciated them. Kleiner (2009) also recorded that the pictures of animals were accompanied by signs consisting of dot, check, sequences and other arrangement of lines. Representations of humans' hands also are common". The incorporation of these symbolic elements could not be for mere decorative purposes only. They could be converging some information, after all writing is all about the application of symbols too.

Sayre (2004:10) posits:" Appreciating arts is never just a question of accepting visual stimuli, but of intelligently contemplating why and how works of art came to be made". As to the motive behind the paintings, it is needful to recollect the motive behind the mimicry that characterizes Greek arts of the "golden age". – The quest for the ideal beauty, the perfect man. The Greeks pursued this feat through their attempt to represent their idealized beauty of the divine, through their artworks. Similarly it may be possible that the Paleolithic paintings represented the search for reality through their conceived metaphysical construct of the beasts, among others. This idealization could stem from relatively strangeness of the beast with reference to its appearance, performance or strength, or the aura in general, exhibited by the beast in question. Irrespective of all odds, Paleolithic paintings still served to record the Paleolithic hunter's world, realistically symbolically, or metaphysically. It also carried along with it the reflection of the Paleolithic hunters own feelings about the world or an aspect of it. This feeling revolves around his awareness, which is instrumental to the interpretation of his experience and as well as the acquisition of the power to harness the elemental contents of the experience for survival – suffice it to say that "Art is inextricably tied to man's survival – not his physical survival, but to that on which his physical survival depends: to the preservation of his consciousness" (Rand, 1975:17).

To the ancient Egyptians, what matter most was, in the words of Beckett (1994) the eternal essence: that which constituted their view of constant reality. In essence

their art seldom aim at capturing changeable variation of outside appearance of the subject, even their eager observations of nature were subject to rigid standardization, often taking the form of symbols. This style can be verified in one of the best preserved mural paintings of the New Kingdom: the eighteenth Dynasty Theban tomb of Nebamun, (ca-1400-1350 BCE) titled “scribe and counter grain” The mural bears the painter’s rendition of Nebamun standing in his boat chasing birds away from a papyrus swamp. The painting further depicts him making a forward stride and swinging his throwing stick. Under his left arm is a hieroglyphic text which reads that Nebamun is enjoying recreation in his external after life. The right hand bears three birds he has caught. In front of and below him, a wild cat impossibly perched on a papyrus stem, holds the wings of a bird in its teeth, and its claws are two birds he has caught. Nebamun’s wife and daughter accompany him on this hunt, bearing the lotuses they have gathered. The figures are scaled in proportion to their rank. One striking feature of the painting is the water which is without reflections of any of the figures; rather, the painter defined the stream by adding fishes and some aquatic plants to it. This mode of rendition tends to project the concept of duality, in a fashion that describes the occurrence of opposites, as alternating experiences, whereby one is not annihilated by the advent or occurrence of the other. For instance, the occurrence of death does not mark an end to life – life continues, and undistorted, even after death – as represented by the water that is devoid of distorted reflections (that characterizes river). Powell (1973:34) reflected this belief thus:” The aim of Egyptians funeral art was to provide for the spirit of the deceased, to give it a home, to protect its body from corruption and to provide it with other bodies in the form of stone figures”. This also points to the fact that Egyptians of the old kingdom believed in the transmigration of human spirit or soul, and the ideal new body found expression in the static, rigidly defined pose of their representation of the king, which expressed not his transient humanity but eternal qualities.

Commenting on the “Oath of the Horatii”, a painting done in 1785 by a neo classist, Jacques – Louis David (1748 - 1825), Clark (1976:21) wrote: “it is really what some art historian want works of art to be, a perfect illustration to social history”. In fact not only that, as in the case of this painting, but also it served as illustration to the path that led to change. The painting depicts three brothers, stretching their hands in salute towards three swords held up by their father, while the women in the background grieve.

The “Oath of Horatti” is a legend, about a conflict between the Romans and a rural group from nearby Alba. Instead of taking on a full scale war, they elected three representative combatants to settle their scores with Horatii from the Roman and the Curatti from the Albans. In the painting, the sons of Horatii are shown with their father pledging an oath to the state. In contrast to the erect, muscular rigidity of the men are a group of weak and crying women. The women are unhappy, not because of the probable loss of the Horatii but also the two families are united by marriage – one of the Horatii is engaged to Camilla, one of the two Alban sisters at the far right. In this work, David meant to create a demarcation between what he considered the admirable willingness of men to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of the state, and the inability of women to overcome their personal, selfish feelings. Moreover, David’s

choice of capturing the moment prior to the battle and the contrasting lighting of the figures creates the kind of theatricality that heightened the drama of the scenes leaving the viewer to respond to the scene with a mixture of rationality and passion. Consequently David's "Oaths of Horatii", according to Stockstad (1999), emerged the emblem of the French revolution of 1793. Its harsh lesson in republican citizenship effectively captured the mood of the new leaders of the French state who came to power in 1793.... Although "Oath of the Horatii" can be viewed as synonymous with glorification of heroic past, yet it is timeless and also the reflection of influential visionary spirit of change. In this regards, it is understandable how one might interpret the painting as that designed to rally republicans (those who believed in the ideals of a republic for France, and not monarchy) by informing them that their cause will require the dedication and sacrifice of the Horatii.

However, the fact that the "Oath of Horatii" is credited with such awareness that contributed to the revolution, does not discard the possibility that not all partisans of that time would decipher nor understand the idea behind the painting. Owing to its historical background, the full appreciation and assimilation of the intended message would be limited to those familiar with the legend. For the uninformed, it could simply represent the beauty of heroism, or even some sort of solidarity with the existing government then. Hence its acceptance into the salon without negative response from the officials. But irrespective of this, however, the painting made its mark.

As time progressed, some artists at one point lost faith in metaphysics and superstitions, with their connection to the past, in search of the present through the infusion of empirical subjectivity into their painting. This resolution found expression in the paintings of nineteenth century artists in Europe, like Gustave Courbet, Daumier, Millet among others.

Jean – Francois Millet (1814 - 1875) whose paintings were dominated by the subject of peasants at work from 1849. He characterized his works by his primary emphasis on the simplicity and nobility of agrarian experience. His paintings of agricultural life display directness in the representation of a peasant's life. Agricultural landscape, among his landscapes, played an important role in Millet's career. His landscapes carry with them the implication of human presence. In his work "Autumn, the Haystacks" (bequest of Lillian S. Timken, 1959) he registered human presence, not only by the diminutive figure of the shepherd, but also by the hay stacks, the large product of human toil and the distant farm houses. This is a depiction of how immense the product and the contribution of labour (agriculture) are to existence. Moreover, the arrangement of the pictorial elements of the painting, the placement of the haystacks and the sheep, coupled with their respective sizes, gave them prominence and dominance, as against the buildings, trees and figures, whose sizes are smaller and appear in the background. The centralized haystacks also symbolize strength and stability while the herd dots the foreground in a pattern that accentuates movement and ornamentation, which spells advancement and nobility.

In one of his earliest scenes of farm labour "The winnowing (le Vanneur) - (1847-48), which is in National Gallery London, Millet depicted a labourer whose looks appear rugged and dramatically high-lit. This representation displays roughness and monumentality. Both the colours worn by the figure (red, white and blue – French national colours), and the act of the subject itself (separating chaff from grain) appears



to make some political statement. The glowing colour of the tossed chaff contrasts greatly with the dark tones of the barn. This feature appears to send a warning about imminent exposure and elimination of unwanted element, for a non-corrupt and free France. "When this painting was exhibited at the salon of 1848, it was praised by the critic Gautier as having everything it takes to horrify the bourgeois "(Jean – Francois Millet – the winnower 2018). "Despite his brief enthusiasm for the revolution, Millet was neither a revolutionary nor a reformer, but a fatalist who found the peasant's heroic acceptance of the human condition exemplary "(Stockstad, 1999:993). Yet, his "The winnower" is a metaphor for revolution, and by the positioning of the farmer, Millet has made the farmer or the class he represents, the hub around which the wheel of revolution and change rotates. Furthermore, the focus and dexterity with which the figure winnows the grain express dignity in labour, bravery and dedication which characterizes the labourer, and thereby making the labourer an icon of revolution. Considering this mode of expression of his, and judging by his fatalistic disposition, one would conclude that he took a stoic stance in the struggle for revolution – like in the words of Eitner (1992): "In giving a heroic quasi – allegorical stature to the toiling peasant, the picture undoubtedly had political implications in 1848" (p.288).

Courbet (1819 - 1877) was another social realist that treated his scenes of labour with monumentality, roughness and capture of the truth about his subjects. His earlier mentioned painting "The stone breakers" done in 1849 has more stories and meanings, than mere representation of the deprived. In the painting, Courbet depicts two figures trying hard to break and remove stone from a road. These figures are dressed in tattered and ripped clothing and set against a low hill that reaches the top of the canvas, leaving a tiny patch of bright blue sky at the upper right corner. This, as a result, isolates these labourers and suggests that they are economically and physically trapped. In other to exhibit what is real, he has rendered a boy that appears still too young and a man that seem too old for such back breaking labour. Still their pose suggests the bravery, resilience and nobility of the labour worker in the face of the toils, suppressions and other challenges engaging the labour and agrarian world of that era.

Both Millet and Courbet, through their works celebrated labour worker, thereby according them some recognition. On the part of Millet, Amazon and Prather (1998) concluded that they fashioned their field workers with the monumentality of Michael Angelo and intergrated them into landscape composition of Poussineque grandeur - as if to redeem the grinding poverty of unpropertied farm life. More so, Courbet and Millet scenes of labour were treated with dignity to the degree that conservative critics and majority of the public (middle class) were made to feel that the works were a threat and affront to establish values.

Meanwhile, Futurism originated as a literary concept, born in the mind of the poet and propagandist, Filippo Marinetti in 1908. It commenced as a rebellion of young intellectuals against the cultural inactivity that gripped Italy during the nineteenth century. It praises the beauties of war, of revolution, of the speed and dynamism of machine technology.

Balla (1871 – 1958), the oldest among the group most strongly influenced the younger Futurists. His painting "Dynamism of a dog on a leash" (1912 – Albright – Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo), capture the futurist fascination with movement with its

multiplication of legs, feet and leash. The little dachshund is depicted, scurrying along on its short legs multiplied and accelerated to the degree of their almost turning into wheels. This device tends to suggest rapid motion and physical activity, which is synonymous with metropolitan life and modern industry. It also reflects the artistic expression of motions, metamorphosis and simultaneity of vision itself. The represented moving object was to blend with its environment in order to avoid clear distinctions between the two. Moreover, “much of the spirit of futurism reflected the flamboyant personality of Marinetti himself ... it attached the ills of an aristocratic and bourgeois society and celebrated progress, energy and change in the field of politics, it unfortunately was to become a pillar of Italian fascism “(Arnasom and Prather, 1998:217).

Paul Cézanne, (1839 - 1906) is the greatest exception among the painters of impressionist generation. He did not simply sort the data of visual experience, but subjected them to a rigorous process of selection and rearrangement, under the guidance of an inward sense of order and value, rather than by the laws of physical nature. He visualized an existence that is devoid of isolation. Things have colour and they have weight, and the colour and mass of each affects or influences the weight of the other.

His desire to record the solidity of nature resulted in a work such as “The Bay from L’Estaque (1886, The Art institute of Chicago), in the painting, the weather is sunny and warm, the effect however is gloomy. The blues of the sky, water and mountains temper the warm golden colours of the foreground elements, thereby neutralizing the accentuation of warmth from them. The landscape lacks the elements like a figure or road that leads the viewer into it, thereby blocking and confronting the spectator into physical and emotional isolation. The composition bears the impression of a three dimensional view into space with the angle of view flattening the scene, creating a two-dimensional effects. In essence, the painting presents a balance between stable and unstable compositional elements. This is reflected in the contrast between the static horizontal of the shoreline at the top and the dynamic diagonal of its counterpart below. In confirmation of this Becket (1994:312) concluded:” it is the tension between actuality and illusion, description and abstraction, reality and invention that makes Cézanne most anassuming subjects so profoundly satisfying and exciting and which provided a legacy for a revolution of form that led way for modern art. This contrapuntal effect is manifested in the townscape where Cézannes organization of the houses, foliage and land takes after a loose grid of horizontal and vertical elements. - which leads to the inference by Stokstad, (1999): The Bay from L’Estaque reveals the artist’s “sense” that nature is a harmony of opposites” (p. 1304) .Technically, the paintings reviewed so far point towards the Endeavour to achieve vivid representation of the subject in relation to the idea the artist is trying to convey. For instance, heroism, humiliation, nobility among others which is expressed through roughness monumentality and calm grandeur of the content of millet’s and Courbet’s paintings. The other aspects showcase a belief system like the tomb painting of the old kingdom Egypt. Another segment has to do whit depiction that expresses the artist’s inner feelings and experience about reality, like Cézanne’s expression of the interconnectivity within the elements of reality. Yet, one thing they have in common is the art of expressing the subject beyond mundane and literal understanding of it.

However, realistic representation, in the context of this study serves as the element that ushers the spectator into the pictorial arena. Evocation of emotions of fear humiliation and like is not intended for the imagery, but that which evokes curiosity as the source of rationality and radical thinking. And radical thinking finds expression in the dynamisms of change and the actualizing the future. Therefore this work intends to seek reality of the subject through the evocation of curiosity and reason.



Plate 1: Cave painting in Lascaux, France, ca 15,000 – 13,000 BCE, all-art.org



Jean – Francois Millet, Winnower (1847 – 48), oil on canvas, 14.9” × 11.4”, all-art.org



Gustave Courbet, Stone breakers (1849), oil on canvas 65" × 94", Gustave-courbet.com



Jacques – Louis David, The oath of Horatti (1784), oil on canvas, 10'10" × 14',  
Source: en.wikipedia.org

## Production Processes

### Conceptual Stage

“The painter ought always to form in his mind a kind of system of reasoning or discussion within himself on any remarkable object before him”. (Da vinci cited in Brown 1877:46) – In his account of the treatise on painting by Leonardo Da Vinci (section 130). The conceptualization and piecing together of the conceived ideas about the subject is founded on the researchers’ shift of the mode of his perception, (unconventional mode of reasoning) of the subject. This approach accorded the researcher some inner experience of the subject, Hence, the birth of futuristic imagery for the painting.

### Sketch stage

This is the primal drawing stage for visual manifestation of the researcher's concept of the subject. The researcher produced different sketches for the painting, after which the most suitable of them was chosen. On the other hand, various elements of the various designs were extracted and configured to create entirely new composition.

### Support

Support means the surface that bears a painting. For instance, canvas, wood panel, paper, wall and so on. For the exploration, the choice of support for the visuals is canvas.

### Stretching

This involves the mounting of a well stretched canvas on a stretcher by pinning the canvas to the wooden stretcher with a gum tacker. After which, the support is ready for painting.



Figure 3.1 Sketch for “The Harvest” (source: Researchers Collection)



Figure 3.2 “The Harvest” Detail (Source: Researchers Collection)



Figure 3.5 Sketch for “Blacksmith’s Forge” (Source: Researcher Collection)



Figure 3.6 Sketch for “Blacksmith’s Forge” (Source: Researchers Collection)



**Figure 3.7 Sketch for “The Entrepreneur” (Source: Researcher Collection)**



**Figure 3.8 Sketch for “The Entrepreneur” (Source: Researcher Collection)**

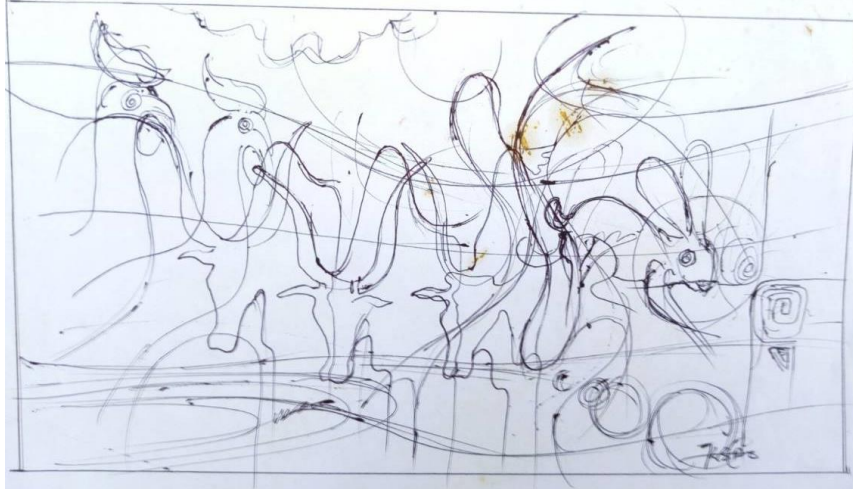


Figure 3.9 Sketch for “Animal Farm” (Source: Researcher Collection)

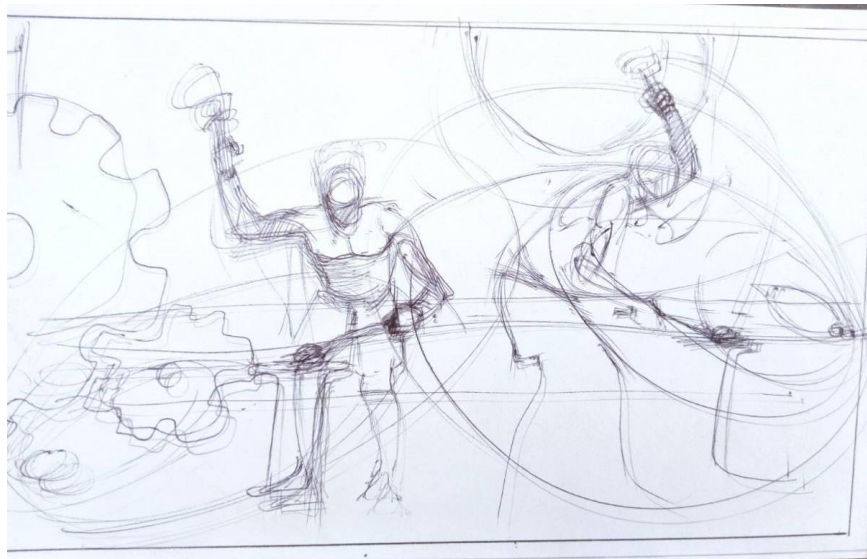


Figure 3.10 Sketch for “Fabrication” (Source: Researcher Collection)

### Figure 3.11 “The Ranch”

#### Priming

Priming is the process of coating the support with primer, in preparation of the surface for painting. The primer used by the researcher is a mixture of tempera (Emulsion house paint) and “Top Bond” glue, as the binder. So the tempera and the binder are mixed in the ratio of one part to two parts respectively, with two parts of water added to the mixture and mixed together. The water is for the purpose of thinning the primer to give an easy flow on application to the support. Priming is done for the purpose of blocking the pores of canvas fabric, and by so doing, serves to prevent the



colours from sinking into the canvas, after application. At this state, the prepared surface is referred to as “ground”. Now it is ready for painting to be done on it, but not before sketching.

### **Sketch Transfer**

The selected sketch is reproduced on the ground with thinned paint. This is executed, with reference to the proportion of the elements to one another and the ratio of the sketch to the main work (as a guide)

### **The Style**

The researcher’s painting technique operates on the premise that painting is an art of control and manipulation of the quantity and quality of light that defines the planes and contours of form. The painting is commenced with the application of thin colour – wash on the drawing. This is followed by the application of thick film of mixed colours, for the definition of the forms and features of the pictorial elements of the subject. Finally, finishing touches are effected by blending the daubs of colours, and adding more details till the desired effect is achieved.

### **Result and Discussion**

The quest to achieve ideal representation as well as to transform the viewers’ intellectual and imaginative approach to indigenous occupation gave rise to the paintings that seek to reposition the occupation. The early stated question seek to address some issues bothering on the achievement of this aim. Consequently, the answer to those questions find expression in the realistic paintings on indigenous occupation executed by the researcher (to that effect).

1. What makes realism the ideal style of painting for the project?

Generally, the painting executed by the researcher on indigenous occupation bear explicit visual interpretation of the subject to the degree that a novice in art practice can interpret literally without difficulties. Moreover, by virtue of its nature, realist painting is prone to rendition of a vivid and comprehensive picture of the subject. In this light the researcher’s works are inclined towards weaving a tapestry of colourful concept of indigenous occupation that is supposed to unfold its entire nature in the imaginations of the viewer.

2. Can realists painting achieve a comprehensive rendition of the researchers’ ideal concept of indigenous occupation, to the conviction of the viewers?

This question calls for reference to one of the researcher paintings on the subject, titled “harvest” (plate 3.5). In this painting a farmer is sited on a chair operating a laptop computer. The background bears the farm land with labourers harvesting tomatoes and packing them inside a truck packed beside the farmland with a bigger truck packed opposite it (to be loaded with the tomatoes too). On the right flank of the background are two national youth coppers – a male and a female – who appear to be collecting some soil samples and probably samples of the fruit for research purposes. Beside the farmer is a heap

of tomatoes whose rendition spells a bountiful harvest. Beyond them is a tractor ploughing a vast land. Generally, farming in Igbo cultural context is not regarded as being synonymous with poverty or backwardness, rather it is an occupation that could above all accord the practitioner a respectable position, especially that of a title holder. Hence the high esteem attached to it then. Now the afore mentioned painting tends to depict farming, as well as farmer in contemporaneous setting. The farmer is depicted as an enlightened mind who also identify with the digital age (as symbolized by him operating the computer). The illustrated labourers and youth coppers tell a story that potrays the farmer as an employer who also invest in research and advancement in productivity and quality-a scientific mind. The tractor stands for a mechanized farming which is synonymous with modern and technology-oriented life. To crown it all, the researcher completed the story with the infusion of the modern and sound trucks, bountiful harvest among others, which stand to represent prosperity

However, this expression is not intended to project mechanized farming as a nouvelle idea to our time, but seeks to reconfigure the practice into the ideal image that should be on par with its value within the context of history, culture and relative contemporaneity.

This could be verified by another related painting titled “Agrarian world” (Plate 3.6) also rendered by the researcher. This work is composed of symbolic colours and illustrations. The colours comprise, yellow which denotes wealth, greens; growth, purple: royalty, brown: soil with its resources, which are used in the illustrations to depict agricultural products, equipment and so on. This composition tends to describe a prosperous world, technical and digitally upgraded, a world of grand nobility and stability.

3. To what degree could traditional painting influence the viewers imaginations about indigenous occupation, into remolding his views about the subject, to align with the researcher’s ideal interpretation of the subject?

The study of another painting by the researcher titled, “Blacksmith’s Forge”(Plate 3.7) would reveal some striking imaginative tendencies in its conceptualization.

The painting is a depiction of blacksmiths in a forge engaged in fabricating, forging, joining and assembling machine parts. The forge does not bear the impression that identifies with the conventional concept of it. It appears to be divided into sections which is visually illustrated, with the corresponding blacksmith executing the function synonymous with a particular section. In this painting also, the harmer becomes mechanized and the anvil set higher than convectional height, in order to allow fabrication in standing position, to the convenience of the blacksmith. On the right flank is a figure fabricating machine parts, with cutting machines. In the background are two figures: one engaged in welding while the other is fixing a ‘keke’ tricycle. Then, at the farthest point is the furnace (electric powered), a figure is pouring molten metal (from the furnace) into a mould. In fact, the setting is deliberately configured by the researcher, in order to achieve that which connotes mass production, fabrication and technical advancement and innovation.

This painting is not done for the sole purpose of eulogizing blacksmithing nor displaying the importance in all ramifications, but to celebrate the endeavor through visual expression as a symbol of creative technology. In essence the painting is targeted at achieving an imagery that projects the subject as being synonymous with advancement, discovery and control founded on creativity. Naturally blacksmithing is tedious therefore it demands much spending of energy, but in the painting, everything seems to be mechanized and the scope of blacksmiths range of output (as visually expressed) appears unlimited. This in essence, serves to symbolize the boundless nature of the realm of creativity.

Creativity applies to everything, therefore time (era) and events are no exceptions especially with regards to contemporary matters. This could be verified in one of the paintings about this thesis titled “The Ranch”. The picture contains some cows in vast grassland. In the foreground is a pool of water from which some of the cows are drinking; some are grazing while others are resting. At the background are two buildings, while at the farthest point of the landscape are hills with the sky looking bright and calm. The cows are arranged in a pattern that combines rhythmic flow with stability. The dominance of greens of the field and the blues of the sky is combined with the warm earth colours of the cows in order to achieve a composition that accentuates serenity, flow and order.

Reflecting on the current issues that are connected with cattle rearing in Nigeria, the researcher observes that some current visual rendition of the occupation depicts that which is synonymous with insecurity, killings, uneasiness among others. Contrary to that, the researcher in “The Ranch” imagined serenity instead. This imagination is built on the researcher’s reflections on idealized interactions or connections between nature and man as the basis for order. This excogitation found expression in the configuration of the picture-elements in a way that would accentuate rhythm, harmony and balance. Apart from this, it is clear that there is no human figure in the composition. This absence is designed to express the notion that order and peace are not subject to the presence nor the authority of man alone without the application of critical thinking – which is fundamental to power of imagination. Therefore, “The Ranch” is an imagery aimed at giving the viewer an insight into the potentials of creative imagination through a futuristic approach to a genre painting.

4. What visual application is suitable for achieving a comprehensive and inspiring depiction of indigenous occupation? The idea of creating an ideal imagery (painting) about indigenous occupation is basically aimed at intimating the viewer with concrete realities buried beneath the superficial interpretations and understanding of the subject. Also to contemporize indigenous occupation maybe attributed to the infusion of relatively futuristic element into the composition, but the true visionary essence and interpretation lie in the core of imaginative creativity. This is employed for the purpose of making the painting possess the potentials to stir imaginative emotions within the viewer. The viewer, in turn begins to view the subject or the idea in a new light or from different perspective. Therefore, the imagery becomes the vista of perception that transcends the mundane visualization

and interpretation of indigenous occupation and perception of painting as mere decoration, in general. This futuristic realism serves as the portal that launches the viewer into realities that lie beyond the veil of conventional interpretations and assertions.



Plate 3: "The Ranch" (2017). Acrylic on canvas, 24 inches \* 36 inches



Plate 4: The Entrepreneur (2018). Mixed media, 24 inches \* 36 inches



Plate 5: "The Agrian World" (2018) Acrylic on canvas, 24inches \* 36inches



Plate 6: "Fabrication" (2018) Acrylic on canvas, 24inches \* 36inches



Plate 7: "The Blacksmith's Forge" (2018) Acrylic on canvas, 24inches \* 36inches



Plate 3.8 "The Harvest" (2018) Acrylic on canvas. 24inches \* 36inches

### Summary

The study involves studio experience that centres on the viability of futuristic realism as ideal medium for depicting indigenous occupation beyond its conventional interpretation, through its power to trigger some curiosities and imaginations within the viewer. This raises some questions about the suitability of realism as the choice-style;

the viability of the style; its level of influence on the viewer's mode of imaginations, and the ideal visual application for expressing indigenous occupation. However, traditional painting alone may not achieve the speculated influence on the viewer. Hence the application of futuristic conceptualization. The resultant configuration is intended to stir the viewer into imaginative analysis of the visual experience. In the context of this study, this futuristic realism gives indigenous occupation new definitions and new dimensions. This is as a result of creative adventures of imaginations triggered by the visual experience (painting). This leads to deeper and wider understanding of the subject: not only within its cultural and historical context, but that of contemporaneity, and philosophy also.

However, technological progress has been accelerating. Machine is gradually taking over the productive activities of man as well as other functions. To some degree this robotic development – as predicted by some scientists and technologists – will get to a point of acquiring super artificial intelligence to the detriment of humanity's survival and existence (technical singularity point). But one way, among others, that would place humans in control, of the speculated situation is through inclination to critical thinking. Although creativity in this regard appears intangible in nature, but fundamental to manifesting tangible innovations and control. Therefore, this genre is intended as a seed of ideas sown and dispersed through interactive visual contact for the purpose of growing a new crop of imaginists.

### **Conclusion**

This study dealt with presentation of indigenous occupation in Awka as a reality and as a concept mainly. It tends to express the fact that in sightful understanding and interpretation of the subject is an attribute on conceptual and futuristic rendition and the potential to arouse the curiosity and imagination of the viewer, onto perceptual sensitivity to the intended transcendental interpretation.

### **Recommendation for further Research**

Discoveries about imaginal impact of futuristic traditional painting are inexhaustible. But beyond futuristic illustration lies other frontiers, like that of colour. An insight into colour could aid a researcher into harnessing their connotative, vibrational and radiational qualities, to creating a more advanced imagery of higher imaginal impact. This potential, in essence could be extended to tackling physiological and psychological issues like effecting healing mental imbalance, stress, among others, in the process of appreciating the representation.

This study should as well be extended to the recreation or repositioning indigenous occupation based on metaphysical values. This call for in depiction that demands some engagement of the artist in a flight of imaginations, in this quest to discover the sublimity of the subject.

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