ABSTRACT

Wastes are everywhere in the world and they exist in different forms. They are discarded objects waiting to get a new life or further degraded. Improper disposal of these wastes causes flooding, environmental pollution and catastrophe because most of them end up in the environment and ocean life. The environment, man, animal and plants suffer from this menace and one of the major pollutants in this discussion is metal. The world is polluted with metal wastes caused by humans. Metal pollution and health is one of the most issues, which has not been given adequate attention to by both the government and the public. When these metal wastes materials are not re-used or recycled, they create a major threat to the eco-system. The history of contemporary or modern art in Nigeria, has connection with the western world especially in the use of foreign materials which are found objects such as metal, fibers, plastics, paper, glass etc. to replace Nigerians media such as calabashes, earth colours, gourds and so on. Artists throughout history have given much preliminary thought to content and devoted a great deal of time to studying methods by which their new ideas can communicate powerfully. This paper aims to address environmental metal wastes pollution in the environment and to document selected works of a unique sculptor, Segun Okewumi, a young, contemporary, Nigerian metal sculptor by examining his works, materials and his ideology. The paper relied on oral interviews with the artist, documented observation of his works, review of published books, journals, articles, published & unpublished thesis, newspaper and essays on the subject matter as well aesthetic artistic analysis.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Environment, Environmental Pollution, Metal Waste, Recycled Metal, Recycling, Segun Okewumi.
INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria’s waste output is estimated at about 32 million tonnes a year (Naijalink, 2020), most of these find their way into the oceans, the human environment and animal habitat and it will take years for them to be removed from the environment. Wastes are man-made and are produced from natural materials. The rest basically ends up in the landfills, incinerator causing environmental issues. The more wastes we produced, the more corrupted the environment grows, destabilizing organisms and the ecosystem (Greg, 2020). Also, the excessive consumption and improper disposal of this wastes and the covid-19 pandemic has really increased the growth of waste in the environment.

According to Shivani (2023), describing Vishwanah Mallabadi, a resident of Bengaluru stated that, there is no such thing as a useless object or waste. Give me anything- discarded metal or plastic items, old gadgets, and dysfunctional printed circuit boards- he will create art out of it. The interdependence of art and society, and the role of art (sculpture) in the built environment dates back to the ancient civilizations of the Greco–Roman eras. Then and now, art is a visual document of historical events, cultural values and religious beliefs of peoples generally. The visual art as a discipline is divided into six specializations, namely: painting, sculpture, art history, ceramics, textiles, and graphics. Sculpture can equally be sub-divided into six in respect to materials and techniques used in its execution. These include; stone work, metal work, modelling work, wood carving, casting and mixed media.

This study is focused on metal waste sculpture. Metal sculptures can be expressed in many ways and also as memorials art, historical monuments, contemporary installations and performance events. It could be welded or casted with the help of a mould. Metal sculptures can be located both indoor and outdoor; they are sometimes located in places like plazas, squares, government buildings, universities premises, airports, museums, churches, and mosques (Bayo, 2010). It is often made from waste metal (junks), or rot iron.

As metal wastes pollution continues to increase in every corner of the society, with growing risk to the environment, artists have been deploying such wastes into alternative uses. Many artists within and outside Nigeria have worked with metal and one of such artists is Segun Okewumi, whose works give inspiring life to waste metal sculpture in Nigeria.

The aim of this study is to explore metal wastes as a medium in sculpture, with a view to broaden the scope of waste resource management/engagement for visual documentation in a built environment. The environment is a place which typically consists of the humans, animals, plants and nature where they live, co-habit and work. It compose of land, water, air (atmosphere). Liqin et al., (2022) elucidates that, the land is divided into four which is the living, land, water and air which all exist together. Human health and wellbeing are intimately linked to the state of the environment. In the past year’s industrialization, urbanization, energy consumption and population growth has been on a rapid growth which has resulted in exploration of the earth mineral resources which at the long run created environmental pollution.

Environmental pollution of heavy metals is increasingly becoming a problem and has become of great concern due to the adverse effects it is causing around the world (Jessica et al., 2020). Worst still, the number of metal wastes we use and discard has multiplied extensively in the world after the pandemic. These metal wastes are filling up the land and oceans. Metal are used for construction, mechanical, electronic and many other things. Sadly, its increase in production has led to waste problem in the environment. There are different types of metals i.e. Iron, gold, silver, aluminum, and alloys such as steel. These metals are categorized into two which are ferrous and non-ferrous. Ferrous metals are metals that contain iron while non-ferrous metals are metals which do not contain irons.
Emile (2020) in her discussion, observed that, if you take all the gold humans have ever mined and melt it down into a cube, it would be about a square meters in size. But every year, we buy more and more of that gold in landfill-with little to no hope of ever being re-used. The reason been that gold is a key component in every electronic product, and this product constitute higher percentage of gold and rare earth elements. And if this product is not properly dismantled, metals and toxins can creep into the environment at all cost. They can find their way into the soil, water and back into the food chain.

Jessica et al (2020) noted that, the environment has been seriously polluted by several pollutants such as inorganic ions, organic pollutants, organometallic compounds, radioactive isotopes, gaseous pollutants and nanoparticles. Most of these metals contains chemicals and metalloids such as iron, manganese, cobalt, nickel, copper, zinc, chromium, titanium, selenium, arsenic, aluminum, vanadium etc. which are toxic to the humans and the environment. Though Saikat et al. (2022), asserts that a few of the most frequent heavy metals that contaminate the environment include mercury, cadmium, arsenic, chromium, nickel, copper, and lead.

The continual dumping of waste metals is worrisome due to embedded serious environmental crisis on the lives of the inhabitant (Whetto, 2019). Recycling them in what is repurposive metal sculpture is an aspect of sculpture that is not highly esteemed, yet very durable, due to dexterous effort required to achieve it. Due to the attributes of metal sculpture, very few artists i.e. sculptors in particular engaged in its production and this may not be unconnected with the public ignorance of its uniqueness. This phenomenon has been responsible for the very low range of metal sculpture commissions unlike the other well patronised sculptural media. Therefore, this study seeks to explore metal wastes to create a work of art that fits within cotemporary period, re-sensitize our intuitive capacity to the medium of expression and also to document a new breed of metal sculptor Segun Okewumi, in relation to his style and uniqueness.

The study seeks to document the art and life of Segun Okewumi, as a prolific metal sculptor, in order to contribute to scholarly reviews. The study also throws more light on the current slogan of waste to wealth strategies that are employed by sculptors of the contemporary time. While the work situated in health-based practices, it has explored the dexterous effort of a professional artist at taming the hazardous effect of wastes to earth and her inhabitants.

**METHODOLOGY**

Data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The photographs of the artist and those of his works were taken. While the secondary sources were gotten from relevant literature on the subject matter like newspaper publications and interviews, citations from journals and magazines, and exhibition catalogues.
Segun Okewumi is a budding energetic artist driven by seething passion for both didactic and reformatory creations. His artistic agency is complimented by vibrant social media presence which has become a personal vehicle to communicating his values and philosophies to a wider audience. Okewumi obtained a national diploma in Art from Yaba College of Technology, Yaba Lagos and also a Fine Art Graduate of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. He practises and expresses his ideas with diverse media such as Soap Stone, Bronze, Metal, Aluminum, Wood and chooses durable metal as a dominating material for his creation. Segun Okewumi is a committed moralist. He grew up in the ancient city of Ibadan which is an important culture center where many accomplished practitioner of different art forms sowed and nurture their careers. He has taken advantage of different workshops both offline and online in order to upgrade his skill having grown up in the ancient city of Ibadan and experienced its varied faces through actual residency and visits. Segun Okewumi as a sensitive artist has come to understand the sentiments of the common man which he keenly sympathizes with. Consequently, he has chosen to deploy his talent in representing the interest of the unheard, turning himself to the voice of the voiceless in other to ultimately better their lot.

The largely brown roofs City of Ibadan furnishes Okewumi with unique inspiration for creation in metal after he has visited the magnificent Mapo Hall, the Bashorun Ogunmola statue and other iconic sculptures in Ibadan. These helped to shape his career form and has thus developed a unique style based on the fluidity of line forms as the basis for any further creative effort. A Metal sculptor per excellence whose creative abilities as set a stage to exhibit alongside few Nigeria renowned contemporary artists in his area of specialty; Olu Amoda, Raquid Bashorun, Alimi Adewale at exhibition themed "SCULPTING THE CITY" at Rele Gallery in Lagos. Prof. Bruce Onabrakpeya and Dr. Adeola Balogun at just concluded International Art exhibition themed "REMAKE THE WORLD" at Ebonylife place, Victoria Island, Lagos. He has also exhibited in a group international exhibition in Titchfield, London themed "AWAKENING".
Contextual Analysis of Segun Okewumi’s Metal Works

In his discussion, Segun stated that working with waste metal is not that easy because the process involves, collecting the waste metals, the shape of it, the texture, the colour and the size also matters, then visualizing the final work how it will look like. A critical look at Segun Okewumi’s works reveals that he got inspirations from life activities, people around, incidence, nature, most especially animals. He also taps from mythological concepts and his experiences of life. The following study of his major works makes the above characteristic his subject matter.

The material used for its production was as a result of the artist’s consciousness about his environment which is informed by the society the artist finds him or herself. Segun Okewumi has developed his unique style based on the fluidity of line forms as the basis for any further creative effort.

Plate 2: Segun Okewumi, Odyssey through Academe 1&2, H10” W3” L3” each, Discarded Metal and Aluminum, 2022.
Photograph by: YemiAdio, 2022

Odyssey through Academe 1&2

The mixed media work titled “Odyssey through Academe I&II” was based on the problems and challenges students of higher education face in their quest of obtaining a degree. It is also a celebration of the determination of these students to be trained and acquire knowledge through formal education despite the hardship posed by the education system of higher institutions of learning.

The desire to celebrate and pay tribute to the struggles and toil that average undergraduate experiences in their quest to acquire a degree inspired the creation of the metal sculptures. The work also tends to draw attention to the problems occasioned by the characteristic economic problems of all developing countries. The work aims to encourage struggling undergraduates amidst the daunting challenges they face in their educational journey. It admonishes that there is light at the end of every tunnel. It is intended to teach the youth that if the necessary input is injected into one’s educational project, one can acquire quality and functional education and become a productive member of society.

It is worthy of attention because it provides a refreshing insight into the potential of the educational system to produce productive graduates if the students are prepared to face the challenges that come their way and the government is prepared to tackle the problems highlighted. It highlights honesty, the ever-present difficulties...
encountered by most undergraduates in Nigeria. These include shortage of books, irregular power supply, transportation problems, insufficient/outdated training equipment, accommodation problems, frequent strike actions, etc. This necessitates the need for students to be proactive, to find their solutions, and for government to find lasting solutions to the bigger problem of required infrastructure.

Segun Okewumi, as a sensitive artist, has come to understand the sentiments of the common man whom he keenly sympathizes with. Consequently, he has chosen to deploy his talent in representing the interest of the unheard, turning himself into the voice of the voiceless to ultimately better their lot. In his material exploration, he sees his materials as messengers, prophets and voices in the wilderness that need attentions to get remedy for social and psychological issues.

Plate 3: Segun Okewumi, Freedom on Leash (State of the Nation), Brass, metal junks and Aluminum, 24by12by6inches, 2018.
Photograph by: Debo Adeolu, 2018.

**Freedom on Leash (State of the Nation)**

Thematically, Segun’s works reflect the complexity of social phenomenon which cannot be easily understood e.g. spate of crime, corruption, poverty, political and marital instability that characterizes the embattled nation/society. Such feeling is seen in position/postures and expressions of his pieces. The artist continually engages in expression of ideas of what the society throws at him. Seguns’s works goes beyond aesthetics of assemblages and the found object as these pieces are both functional and the same time serves as objects of art. He used his art works as a metaphor to visually expound the collapse of socio-economic conditions.

In his discussion, Segun stated that, are we truly “completely free” after the pronouncement of our freedom in 1960, I believe we Nigerians deserve the best in a democratic country that is geographically blessed; rich in culture; full of talented people; land flowing with milk and honey yet masses are living in abject poverty. Politicians siphoning our hard-earned national revenue all in the name of democracy. Is this democracy or crazy demo? Is this change or illusion of change? Is this an independence or freedom on leash? The work talks about the current situation of the country and the fruitless promises of our leader’s way back.

There are five figures in the work. One sitting on top with a broken chain in his hands while the others are below the base of the work. The figurative expression in the work signify the masses, the broken chain signifies hard freedom but not totally free. The tap is an illusion of the promises the politicians has made for the masses, when
Nigeria gained independent in 1960, numerous promises were made by the leaders but one keeps asking questions that are we truly free since the masses are still suffering till now. 1960 was welded on the body of the tap to signify the year Nigerian got it independent. The broken chain signifies that they are free but still struggling, meaning not totally free. One would imagine that the big tap should be dropping water but it seems dried and empty. Meaning the water, the Nigerians are lacking are the promises expected from the politician to provide for the masses. The works seems to carry the title “freedom on leash” not “fresh unleash” meaning the freedom is not yet attained.

Photograph by: Debo Adeola, 2020

The Lynching of Negroes
Segun’s sculpture uses the human force to explore the construction of identity in a colonial African context but also attempts to critique stereotypical depictions of blacks, being abused in a foreign land. Segun stated that, “for me, wastes represent the voice of nature. Sometimes they can be gentle and quiet. Other times they can be really violent and brutal, and that is how nature is. If you are not careful, nature will knock your health down”.
In his work the lynching of Negroes, a sordid past populated by line of wan black slaves bound in chains and drenched in their own sweat as they disembarked from rickety ships still seem to revisit many white people who feel that the indebted to their white counterparts for being allowed to live the United States.
They hold the opinion that the black section should express their gratitude by being docile and by swallowing every insult directed at them by the whites. The United States of America acclaimed bastion of freedom is fast becoming a flashpoint for racist encounters which have re-occurred without a permanent end despite waves of nationwide protest. The latest and the George Floyd incident is another instance of racist encounters that ended up in tragedy. This and others before it have aroused the interest of Segun Okewumi a new star on the horizon of arts who has forged and welded together a powerful and symbolic representation of this trend of marginalization and repression deftly sculpted in metal and ensconced on a metal pedestal draped with the American colour.
This scathing depiction shows human form in handcuffs that indicate the underprivileged condition and limited opportunity of blacks within the white universe. The American logo was depicted because that was where the incident happened. The work depicted a man who is chained, unarmed going through a lot of abuses because of the colour of his skin. I intend to use this work to raise global concern about the need for decisive actions to end all forms of racism. Segun’s sculpture uses the human force to explore the construction of identity in a colonial African context but also attempts to critique stereotypical depictions of blacks, being abused in foreign land.

Plate 5: Segun Okewumi, Omolaso, metal, seashell, rubber, autobase paint, 30by12by12inches, 2019.

Photograph by: DeboAdeolu, 2019.

Omolaso

Segun is known for his magnificent abstract sculpture. In his work Omolaso, the Ibadan based artist portrays the identity, character, virtue and beauty of African women going through a lot to make sure all their children become great in life. Omolaso is gotten from a Yoruba proverb which states Omolaso obi, meaning the beauty of parents is their children. It is an indigenous word that compares the beauty of cloth to children. No matter how expensive a cloth is, one day it will wear out nevertheless a cloth cannot be compared with a child. In Africa, much preference are placed on the children, yet Africa nurses the belief that a wealthy but childless person, is nobody in the society.

The role of the woman cannot be overlooked when it comes to child upbringing. The woman represents the parents who is surrounded by her own children not only her own children but other children also. This is the woman who takes care of us when we were young but a time will come when the children will be the ones to take care of their mother. Basically this highlights the reciprocal relationship between parents and their offsprings who are expected to return the care they had received when these parents become old. The work is also a replica of Inu ikoko dudu ni eko funfun ti jade meaning no matter what a child claims to be or become, it is the parents that does the upbringing and goes through hard times in life to make sure the child becomes successful in life. In his discussion, Segun stated that, I see arts as a powerful tool to counsel, motivate, encourage and to tell a true story.
Plate 6: Segun Okewumi, Marital bliss, metal scrap, auto base paint, 18by7by7inches, 2019.
Photograph by: Debo Adeolu, 2019

Marital bliss

Segun’s philosophical basis for this is expected in this saying “pay attention to what is lesser than you so that greater things in life can pay attention to you”. This, he has achieved in the use of what people sees as lesser things (junk, scraps and waste metal) of which after careful thinking he has been able to put life in them. Untold joy can result from cooperation and lifelong partnership as exemplified in married condition. Child birth which often is a source of great joy stems from such relationship that provide insight into each other’s mind. Segun stated that, “my use of recycled metal and more importantly the digging tools symbolizes the overflowing joy that follows when people cooperate genuinely. I created this motivating tool for every newly wedded couple that might have pregnancy delay and to wish them happy blessed home with joyful seeds”.

Brown colours were used to paint the face of the parents which represent earth colour. Basically earth is like our parents accommodating different people no matter the colour, ethnicity, culture, belief and language. Yellow signifies vibrancy, they are the joy of the parents, the red signifies love that dwells among the parents and the children. The works educates us that the future of the child is on the parents. If the parent should refuse to bring up the children in a proper way, the child might end up becoming a nuisance in the society. Marital bliss, is a call to the man to love his wife affectionately vis-à-vis the wife so that there can be peace at home, and through the presence of the peace the children can enjoy a good atmosphere for good upbringing.
Ijapa t’iroko oko Yanibo

Scraps of metal, aluminium, mechanical scraps are major materials that the artist employs in this sculpture in the round. Segun submits that, “I grew up surrounded by folklores and stories, and the sculpture is an important part of Yoruba folklore. Growing up as African child, tales are often told by our grandparents to amuse the children. One of it is the story of Ijapa (Tortoise) which really put a smile on my face and blessed my childhood memories. Moonlight poetry is an established folklore genre among the Yorubas; its purpose is to educate the children about the socio-cultural norms and values which forms an integral part of their adult behavior and their conceptualization of the world around them”.

The story is centered on Ijapa (Tortoise) and Iyanibo (wife of Tortoise). When the Tortoise and his wife got married the wife found it difficult to conceive so the Tortoise sought help from an herbalist concerning how his wife’s conception. The herbalist gave the tortoise a medicine to give to his wife to eat that after eating it she will conceive. Before leaving the presence of the herbalist, the herbalist warned the tortoise several times that the medicine is basically for his wife alone. Upon getting home the aroma of the medicine caught his attention alighting near by a bush, he ate the whole medicine and to cut the long story short, the stomach of the Tortoise started protruding. The story centres on greediness and self-discipline.

Odeyemi (1980), observed the physical features of Ijapa as an animal, makes children to fantasize Ijapa tricks in his stories. Being a reptile, Ijapa lives inside holes and is found in the Savannah area. Making a big hero out of small ugly Tortoise is one of the peculiarities of all Ijapa’s tiny plots. Its present size according to a particular tale is a repercussion of one of his tricks.
CONCLUSION

The effort at converting waste into a medium of expression is a way of calling the attention of the public to the consciousness that waste is “no waste” but also a useful material (Folorunso, 2010). This study has proven that the practice of re-use can be employed to utilize discarded metal (which are common constituent of waste in the environment) as a medium in sculpture. This will add to the number of artistic media thereby adding value to condemned items and creating another avenue for recycling thereby saving our planet. Such consciousness and commensurate conscious effort at reducing waste will ascertain safety of the human inhabiting the earth and the environment at large.

Metal sculpture is now becoming popular and widely known across Nigeria because of the attention it is getting. To this end, many people are now involved in this art but very few are been documented. In this study, Segun Okewumi’s works are studied where natural forms were used as elements translated into a contemporary language to reflect the daily life in his environment. He integrates influences from animal characteristics to convey inspirational and educational messages as it could be seen in his work titled “Breaking Barrier, Great Heron, Defence Mechanism, Horse Power etc.”, through this, he advocates and educates on safer environment for man, fauna and flora.

In absorbing a vast number of subjects and influences, there is a close connection between the works, in terms of imagery, source and his vision. He makes them part of his artistic consciousness. Finally, Segun Okewumi’s metal works create deep meaning to life and also represent the combination of life philosophy, nature and creativity, therefore educating, inspiring and creating a good sense of aesthetics in the society.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicting interests.
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