

PERFORMANCE ART AS VISUAL CULTURE: FOCUS ON SELECTED WORKS OF NIGERIAN JELILI ATIKU

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to bring to the fore an aspect of the visual arts that has over the years been so neglected in academic circles that no attempt has been made to incorporate it in the Nigerian university curriculum system. In fact, to-date, this versatile aspect of our visual culture still begs for recognition save for the efforts of personalities such as Jelili Atiku who have gone a step farther to popularise this area of visual art locally and abroad. Performance art is a generic name for visual art dealing with an amalgamation of all aspects of arts and clustered together to enact certain aspects of society or personalities that either needs eulogy or denigration. It comes under the title of Kineasthetics. Kineasthetics means visual aesthetics in motion because the performance is in time and space with or without audience participation. This paper mainly focuses on some of the works of a renowned Nigerian kineasthetician, Jelili Atiku, and the implication of his works for issues and personalities in the Nigerian societal system. This paper, therefore, argues for performance art to be incorporated in the Nigerian university curriculum.

Keywords: Performance, Kineasthetics, Visual Culture, Technology, Installation

INTRODUCTION

Many people associate Performance Art with controversial government policies as it relates to the arts and other standardised ways of life whereas others treat it as simply a way of re-enacting certain areas of society. In actual fact, Performance Art delves into other areas as espoused in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1970) itemised human needs in hierarchical order as follows: Psychological needs, Safety needs, Love and Belongingness needs, Esteem needs and Self-actualisation needs, at the apex. It is not the aim of this writer to dwell in detail on these needs but it suffices to state here

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that the Kineaesthetician's primary motive of enacting any performance is predicated on these needs as espoused by Abraham Maslow. In this regard, the performance artist is concerned with inter-cultural relationships devoid of xenophobic and reprisal actions as is the case in South Africa against other African brothers and sisters. Performance Art highlights man's inhumanity to man and, interestingly, it is a part of our visual culture that visualizes and accentuates societal norms. It is instructive to note here that Performance Art is not theatre and not music performance. In fact, kineaestheticians are largely social critics and their shows have to do with space and audience display.

Atiku (2016) avers that this Maslow's five-tier hierarchy must be fulfilled by any well-meaning government the world over, failure of which performance would be staged to remind the leaders about their responsibilities to the people. Instructively, the whole world constitutes the primary constituency of Jelili Atiku as he navigates the entire globe and brings to the fore the ills or eulogy in society. Some performances outside Nigeria such as "*Egungun Alabala Mandela*" talk about the ills of racial discrimination, xenophobia, threats of nuclear power countries, for example, China, and North Korea.

One of the major aims of Atiku's performance is to foster unity, peace and happiness and progress amongst societies of the world. He has performed in different countries around the world at conferences, art exhibitions workshops, during talk-shows, and festivals in addition to organising street shows and performances on university campuses. Arguably, the Kineaesthetician is a philosopher who articulates his performance via the pulse of the people. He is a classical example of a humanitarian in the sense that he takes the interest of the people at heart. In the cause of his performance, some insensitive government officials arrest and detain him for daring to enact a performance that exposes their misdeeds. Jelili Atiku is a case in point as he has been arrested by the Nigerian Police and detained severally for enacting performances that highlight the inadequacies of the government.

Moreover, the Kineaesthetician is not just a performer but also an art critic, an illustrator, a social critic and a social commentator who puts all the paraphernalia of art to bear in his performance. These various areas of art include textiles as evident in his costumes; in sculpture as his props of carvings and metal cast works illustrate; and in painting as evidenced by his body adornment and ornamentation.

This paper examines this new phenomenon in Nigeria's visual arts culture. Performance Art differs from performing arts or theatre arts. Performance artists are mostly social critics who carry their crusade on the street, exploit space and audience display. In fact, Performance Art could be likened to the masquerade known as "Ekeze" of Ovbiogie village in Ovia North-East local government area of Edo State of Nigeria who goes about alone wearing junks

mostly snail shells, empty cans and other objects, unaccompanied by the usual instrumentalists, singers and dancers, whose primary duty was to ward evil spirits off the land. The masquerade comes out unannounced and varnishes into the thick forest at night (Odiase, 2014). Performance Art in this paper is seen from the perspective of Jelili Atiku of Nigeria. It also looks at the philosophy behind Jelili Atiku's performances, their aesthetic implications and, above all, the socio-political relevance of Performance Art. Performance Art is relatively new in this part of the world but personalities such as Jelili Atiku and Yinka Shonibare, an exponent of installation art, are pioneering this new phenomenon in the visual culture.

BACKGROUND

Howells (2008) posits that Performance Art probably started in the 1960s in the United States. It was initially used to express any live artistic occasion that incorporated musicians, poets and film-makers as well as studio artists. Though we refer to the 1960s in this write-up, there were earlier precursors of performance art, for example, the live performances of the Dadaists and the Bauhaus of Germany in 1919. This incorporated a theatre workshop to survey the relationships between space, sound and light. Jerome (1989) notes that the Black Mountain College that was founded in the United States by the Bauhaus teachers that were sent into exile by the notorious Nazi Party sustained the incorporation of melodramatic studies with the visual arts. Twenty years prior to the 1960s' happenings, Jerome (1989) contends that there existed the "Beatniks" that were typically cigarette smokers, who wore sunglasses and black berets. They patronised coffee-houses in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although the term "Performance Art" had not been officially coined at that time, all of these groups were forerunners to Performance Art.

At the dawn of the 1970s, Performance Art became a universal expression, and its description more precise. "Performance Art" meant that it was live, and that it was art and not theatre. People more often misconstrue the two concepts because of its live enactment with some elements of dramatisation; some scholars tend to liken it to theatre. Performance Art also meant that it is an art that could not be bought, sold or traded as goods. In this regard, performance artists see the group as a means for taking their art openly to public domain, thus eliminating the requirement for galleries, agents, brokers, tax officers and any other entrepreneurship agent. Besides visual artists, musicians, film producers and poets, Performance Art since the 1970s now encompasses multi-media displays, songs, chants and dance. Still it is not conventional theatre. However, this writer believes this is just a matter of semantics. Most of the times all of these indices will be incorporated in a single performance; and since Performance Art is always done live, no two performances are ever precisely the same. The 1970s also witnessed the beginnings of "Body Art", a development of Performance Art that initially began in the 1960s. In Body Art, an artist's body or the body of spectators

represents the canvas. Body Art ranges from splashing willing spectators' bodies with different colours of paint and then making them wriggle on a canvas. The 1970s also witnessed an increase in autobiography being incorporated into a performance. This kind of story-telling proves to be enjoyable to most of the audience as was the case with *Egungun Alabala Mandela*.

At the dawn of the 1980s, Performance Art incorporated technological multi-media into performances as a result of heightened awareness of technology. Of late, Kineaestheticians have incorporated the use of Microsoft PowerPoint into performances which also include installation. Simply put, Performance Art keeps evolving and it would soon become even more sophisticated. Who knows? This writer has a hunch that Performance Art will involve the use of 7D stagecraft technologies sooner than later.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PERFORMANCE ART

- i. Performance Art is a live art in the sense that it is performed before an audience in time and space. Although Performance Art has all the trappings of theatre, it is not theatre in categorical terms.
- ii. Performance Art is not offered for sale but the organisers may sell admission tickets to interested spectators.
- iii. Performance Art is an amalgamation of all the aspects of art, whether visual or performing arts including areas such as painting, sculpture, graphics, ceramics, textiles, dialogue, poetic versions, music and dance, incantations and chants, opera, film and television footage and lightings, live animals and fire and artificial rain. In short, there are as many variables as there are artists.
- iv. Performance Art is best referred to as iconoclastic because artists go to great lengths to break long established traditions in their performance.
- v. Performance Art may be sarcastic, entertaining, horrifying, amusing and shocking depending on the theme the Kineaesthetician projects. Irrespective of the description, Performance Art is designed to be a memorable event aimed to correct some societal ills.
- vi. Performance artists sometimes apply the technique of ventriloquism by making their voices echo as though they are coming out of somebody else or some animal. This assertion was noticed by Osaigbovo (2016) as he witnessed the performance titles *Agbo Rago* by Jelili Atiku. In this performance, Atiku was in the midst of goats and rams in the market where they are sold.
- vii. Performance Art could also include Installation art.

Although Performance Art is comparatively new in Nigeria, it started a long time ago with the experimental art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Highlighting the high-class lifestyles ideas of the period's important

personalities, these earliest types were influenced by theatre, dance and music performance, visual art, poetry, jesting and other popular entertainment genres. Modern performance artists such as Jelili Atiku use live events to promote popular beliefs, often through premeditated aggravation and attempts to offend high-class personalities' tastes or expectations. In fact, there has been some sort of Performance Art practices in our local communities when during festivals, some important personalities in society that people hitherto fear to talk derogatively to because of their societal influence are openly criticised as a result of some unacceptable behaviours they may have exhibited in the community such as adultery and conversion of other people's property. This was rather "crude" Performance Art because after the festival, the people are usually afraid to talk to the same people.

Performance Art's recognition as conventional art since the past thirty years has led to new styles in its application and perception. Sardonicly, Hyatt-Mayor (2012) noticed that the need to situate performance within art's history has led institutions, museums and scholars to focus centrally on photographs and video clips that were intended only as credentials of live procedures. Under these circumstances, such documented materials replace the art status of the original performance work. This action is against the goal of many artists, who first started performance as a substitute of visual art.

On the other hand, some kine aestheticians and institutions now stage re-enactments of earlier performances to recall the experience of a live event of the past. New methods, or relational aesthetics, interventionist art and situations have in recent times emerged. These are almost similar to the Performance Art of the past, as these new approaches engage the spectator and encourage their active contribution to the artistic assembly. In the meantime, visual culture, succinctly put, is practised and exemplified by the society thereby becoming one with it.

Larue (1998) postulated that the 21st century would be a period of scientific renaissance likely to trigger chaos, anarchy and nuclear war between nations of the world. Ten years later, Bailey (2008), rhetorically asks whether humanity will survive the 21st century. The impulse behind Larue and Bailey's feelings must have been, perhaps, an attempt to enhance human values; and eliminate global catastrophic risks, which have their consequent nuclear war, bio-tech plagues, and nanotechnology arms races. Radest (2016) avers that the world is at risk and human beings have made it so. People's violence toward each other, for instance, xenophobic attacks in South Africa on fellow Africans and, ultimately, global consciousness renders authority to the claims of xenophobia attackers. For people not to engender genocide, terror, and torture in the 21st century conscious efforts must be made to sensitise the world on the after-effects of these attacks. However, the turn of event and our

ability to raze the world itself makes a sad commentary reading of our faith regarding the importance of human lives.

Yet, in denying that in our post-modern era, with its heavy prominence on financial capitalism, competitive markets are anticipated to produce abundance of goods and services and human actions have become more aggressive. Their actions are, thus influenced by the ideal of capitalism, whereby everything is a product within this context, as observed by Pagnes and Stenke (2011).

The performance, “*Oginrinringinrin*” by Jelili Atiku is an artistic venture and social involvement that allows for the conception of channel of communication with space and spectators. The aim is to project the state of human values and protection, management crisis and show concern for the protection and expansion of human’s desire for freedom, achievement and security. It also aims to engage public space as a social tool for the production of socio-political artworks and documentation in addition to striving to provide a critical framework for discussing the issue of security and leadership. In this regard, people from diverse cultures ought to be alerted on the acute threats and the need to empower them on taking charge of their own lives.

In Jelili Atiku’s performances, the medium of expression in the projects are principally installation and performance, which also incorporate dance, theatrical displays, graphics, photography and mixed and multimedia simulations. This means that his performances, according to Atiku (2014), evoke the *Egungun (Masquerade)* technique with interdisciplinary involvement of actions, makeover / reconstruction, ritual / ontology, spatial responsiveness and intercession. Atiku explains that installation is an integral part of his performance because performance starts from where installation ends. He elaborates further that even his body and costumes are part of the installation.

WHO IS THIS JELILI ATIKU?

Jelili Atiku is a renowned Nigerian multimedia artist and Kineaesthetician with a bias towards political commentaries, human rights and justice, which he achieves via photography, drawing, sculpture, installation, video and live performances. Atiku endeavours to help spectators appreciate the world and increase their comprehension and experiences to enable them to develop a new meaning in their lives and environments. As the foremost pioneer of this area of art in Nigeria, Atiku is in a class of his own. He is a *Primus Inter Pares* and a *Sui Generis* of his time. He blazes the trail in the area of kineaesthetics. Most performance artists, including Jelili Atiku, are iconoclastic because of their aptitude to break traditions and their no-nonsense stance on issues of public importance.



Fig. 1 The Nigerian Kineaesthician, Jelili Atiku

For the past years, Atiku has dared several aspects of the Nigerian society and has based his art on contemporary concerns, especially those issues that threaten our collective way of life and the nourishment of our world. Atiku (2014) posits that these concerns range from psycho-social and emotional effects of harrowing occurrences such as poverty, violence, war, ecosystem degradation, corruption and climate change that is related to our ever-violent world.

Atiku was born on a Friday of 27th day of September 1968 in Ejigbo, Lagos, Nigeria. He attended Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria and the University of Lagos, Nigeria where he bagged the Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) and Master of Arts (Visual Arts), respectively. He taught sculpture in the Department of Art and Industrial Design, Lagos State Polytechnic, Lagos, Nigeria. He is a project leader of Art Africa Forum and the artistic Director of AFIRIperFOMA – a group of performance artists in Africa in addition to serving as the Chief Co-ordinator of Advocate for Human Rights through Art (AHRA), a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Atiku has an intimidating *curriculum vitae* behind him. Apart from his more than a hundred performances as a kineaesthetician, he has won 12 awards, staged seven solo visual art exhibitions, three two-man art exhibitions, one three-man art exhibitions, four four-man art exhibitions, 88 group art exhibitions, 13 residency/collaboration shows, staged 25 workshops, taken part in 60 conferences, seminars, symposia and talks, produced one Master of Arts thesis, written eight books and monographs, published 17 articles, produced seven unpublished articles, and produced two book illustrations, three monumental sculptures / drawings, four logo designs. Furthermore, he has worked as an Assistant Professor at Brown University, Providence, Rhodes Island in the US. He has also worked as part-time lecturer at Lagos State Polytechnic, Ikorodu, as a Graduate Assistant at the University of Lagos and an Art teacher in a secondary school., In addition, he has offered 14 curatorial services and has juried two art competitions. He has also served in 12 different public offices, and four in the private sector. He is also a member of 12 professional and social bodies. Atiku takes keen interest in politics.

JELILI ATIKU'S PERFORMANCES

Atiku has to his credit, 153 performances made between 2008 and the present day. Atiku (2019) has staged in Nigeria and other parts of the world; however, for the purpose of this paper the focus is on a few of such performances and their significance to the Nigerian society in particular and the world in general.

Oginrinringinrin I

This is a subject of one of Atiku's projects; it is a Yoruba word meaning *deep insight*. It refers to the nature of man, as a representational element and allegorical statement that helps the growth of human awareness on significant issues of human principles and protection and the performance is a the reawakening of the human consciousness.

Over the years, Atiku has made his performances popular the world over. More often, Atiku invites his audience to become part of social re-engineering, which serves as a platform for rearranging their consciousness and renewing their perceptions about life. Atiku uses various methods and media coupled with his keen focus to embark on this various campaigns. Most of his performances are usually provocative, which most times calls for government intervention, although his aim is to foster better co-operation and unity.

Atiku describes his performances as 'visual education', which primarily focuses on the subject matter with captivating aesthetics as its outcome. In fact, he breathes life into performances using striking and breadth-taking attires, provocative body language and, most times, horrifying props such as skeletons and skulls as well as carved cultic images.

The surprise or uncertainty brought about by Atiku's performance often calls for clarification. He is always keen to guide onlookers through his work. However, there is no desire to dictate a reaction to how an audience draws its conclusions. It opens up dialogue so that in the event of a performance, one may help in developing accepted norms, with a final objective of improving our society.

Egungun-Alabala Mandela (Oginrinringinrin I)

This performance was a processional type that harped on the framework of a second burial of President Nelson Mandela. *The Economist* (2009) avers that amongst Mandela's many achievements, two stood out. First, he was the world's most inspiring example of determination, generosity and dignity in the face of racial discrimination and intimidation; he was incarcerated for more than 27 years for his belief that all men are created equal. During the dark years of his imprisonment on Robben Island, he seemed freer behind bars than those that incarcerated him. This generosity had to do with how he

engineered and oversaw South Africa's revolution and transformation from a personification of unpleasantness into a *rainbow nation* in which people, regardless of their race, are entitled to being treated with respect. Mandela has, therefore, been transmogrified and apotheosised into an *Orisha* (Deity) and so the ritualistic rites of association with *Irunmole* (spirit entities) needed be performed.

The performance, according to Atiku and its figurative contents consisted of *Kanaga* (Mask), crucifix, *Omi* (Water), *Obi* (cola-nut), *Orogbo* (Bitter cola), *Iyo* (salt), two Hundred *Opon Ifa* (Ifa Divisional trays) cups and *Ankara* (cloth) that was worn by co-performers. These objects served as objects of commemoration and symbols of dignity. This idea was borrowed by Atiku who made reference to the Dogon cosmology. They use masks in traditional burial rites known as *Dama*. The performers in this rite gyrate their upper bodies, swinging their masks in rhythmic circles, to symbolise life's reincarnation energy. In this symbolic enactment, according to Hyatt-Mayor (2014), their outstretched movements symbolically spread the force of life throughout the world, hence the centrality and essence of the mask and other ritual paraphernalia in the performance.

Egungun-Alabala Mandela was enacted as a figurative meaning of the essence of purposeful leadership. This performance was staged on Friday April 11 2014 at the University of Texas at Austin, in the US with 11 co-performers who were art students of the university. *Egungun-Alabala Mandela (Oginrinringinrin I)* was successfully enacted with figurative incantations laced with ritual paraphernalia of remembrance. This event brought to the fore the concept of the threefold idea of re-evaluating the past, and reshaping the present in addition to attempting to restructure the future.



Fig. 2 Egungun Alabala Mandela (*Oginrinringinrin I*),
University of Texas at Austin, USA, (Friday April 11 2014)
Photo: Hakeem Adewunmi

Ologbere (Oginrinringinrin II)

The 20th century has witnessed some revolutionary breakthroughs in many fields particularly science and technology, which also incorporate advances in nuclear science. This advancement has been coupled with the proliferation of nuclear armaments and has given rise to the fear of future catastrophes likened to those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The five nuclear states namely, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China, which are the only countries, allowed to possess nuclear weapons, according to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, have become leading threats to world peace and harmony. The total world's stockpile of nuclear armaments has heightened this fear further.

In fact, many security experts contend that the most worrisome issue in this case is the proliferation policy and the vulnerability of other less powerful states. Whereas some schools of thought believe that these armaments are too deadly and that these nuclear countries should agree to give them up, others believe that they are essential for the defence of the various countries that possess them. Such a backdrop inspired the contents, objects, meanings and actions of the performance of *Ologbere (Oginrinringinrin II)* that was enacted at the International Performance Art Festival at Slussen /Södermalmstorg and Fylkingen Stockholm in Sweden on 27th April, 2014. The performance features the use of the flags of the five nuclear weapons states (the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China) by the lead performer, Atiku. These are countries that have advanced warheads. The performance also features a skeleton of a woman, milk, anchor-twine, and a wooden-carriage. It involved a processional street walk. In it, the performer Atiku drags the skeleton of a woman along and sometimes carries it like a baby. The skeleton is laid on a wooden carriage, which was dragged along the streets with the help of a twine. The kineasthetician intermittently “feeds” the skeleton with milk from one of the feeding bottles hung onto his waist and dangling down to the ground. The performance concludes in a gallery space (Fylkingen) whereby all the props of the performance are installed and text and graphics are integrated.



Fig. 3 The Performance Ologbere
International Performance Art Festival PALS (Performance Art Links), Slussen
/Södermalmstorg and Fylkingen Stockholm, Sweden (April 27, 2014)
Photo: Chelsea C

The aims behind Atiku's performances are clear and unambiguous. *Ologbere (Oginrinringinrin II)* features a disturbing scene in which a figure (Atiku) dragging a plastic skeleton along the streets by a figure (Atiku), who is clad in the flags of the nuclear weapon states. This performance is a paradoxical reprimand for these nuclear states; it underscores the fact that the security or extinction of the world rests squarely on their shoulders. His performances also highlight the successes and failures of leadership of nations and societies as documented in recent performances such as *Egungun-Alabala Mandela (Oginrinringinrin I)* and *I Will Not Stroll with Thami El Glaoui*.



Fig. 4 Eleegba (Oginrinringinrin III)

Gordon Institute of Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA) Live Art Festival, Ritchie Building,
UCT Hiddingh Campus, University of Cape Town, South Africa (Thursday 4 and Friday 5
September 2014)

Photo: Ashley Walter

Eleegba (Oginrinringinrin III)

Elégbà connotes good character in Yoruba cosmology. *Elégbà* assigns appropriate punishments to whosoever deserves to be shaped in personality or human values. *Eleegba* as a social intervention performance integrated dance techniques and borrowed profoundly from the ideals and actions of an *Elégbà* (The upright man). In this performance, five mannequins, which are dressed in the flags of the five nuclear states of the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China, are installed at the façade of the Ritchie Building, UCT Hiddingh Campus, University of Cape Town, South Africa and knotted with twines in a form of nuclear pictogram. The performer (Atiku) appears like a deconstructed human image, wearing a long conical form basket as head gear with five masks fastened to his face and body painted in dark brown, dancing energetically around the mannequins and whipping them viciously. These actions are accompanied by sounds of Yoruba drum, which come from the performer's body through several smaller speakers which are fastened to his costume. The audience is invited to participate in the performance through writing from the 42 papers that encircle the five mannequins. This performance produces a similar interpretation as that of *Ologbere* pertaining to nuclear proliferation. Whereas *Ologbere* harbours pity for the less powerful states represented by the skeleton, *Eleegba* inflicts

corporal punishments on the five countries by the constant and brutal strokes of the whip they are subjected to as Fig. 4 illustrates.

Yerima's wedding

Mahatma Gandhi, the great Indian leader on 22 October 1925 queried the justification behind the human value system. He contended that the foundation of cruelty and brutality were wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice and politics without principles. It is against this backdrop that Atiku in this performance questions Nigerian Senators over their resolution on the girl-child marriage in Nigeria. This decision succinctly signals the deterioration and ostensible sinking of the human values system in Nigerian societies. The performance highlights the issue of integrity dilemma in Nigerian governance. A serving senator, who was aged above 50 married a 13-year-old minor. To Atiku, this is unacceptable and, indeed, condemnable. In this performance, Atiku is clad in Muslim attire as Yerima, the senator, who incidentally is an executive governor of a state in Nigeria. This performance is also a procession whereby the audience is treated to a nobility style wedding with the bride and the groom mounting an Elizabethan type cart. Manuscripts were distributed to the audience mostly highlighting the evils of the girl-child marriage.



Fig. 5 Jelili Atiku as Yerima in Yerima's Wedding

Holy Ovonramwen Cathedral

This performance took place in Benin City on the 6th and 7th of December of 2014 as part of the exhibition entitled "Whose Centenary?" curated by Ines Valle, an independent curator and art critic and was headed by Peju Layiwola, a then associate Professor of Art History and head of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos (now a professor). The numerous artists that feature in this unique road show exhibition include Atiku, a sculptor and multi-media and performance artist.

Prior to his major performance on Igun Street, there was a procession of all the artists and cultural dancers from Arala Street to Akenzua Street to the Airport Road, Ring Road and, finally, Igun Street, where the exhibition was staged in collaboration with the Igun guild artists. Atiku was clad in a gold-coloured packaging cloth that was sewn as a cassock. According to him, the choice of that apparel, apart from the colour denoting wealth, had to do with re-importing the black culture that was stolen by the Europeans. In this regard, he was the Prophet of the Cathedral and was ministering.

He has three evangelists, one female and two males who read from the prayer book in turns. The cathedral has the photograph of Oba Ovonramwen in the background, a red square floor whose centre is superimposed by a gold circular rug. Copies of prayer books are arranged round the cathedral. The prophet has a red read dress constructed out of cardboard papers, a staff in his left hand and a bell in his right hand. At intervals, he jingles the bell vigorously while gesticulating, reminiscent of the “white garment prophets”. There are 12 prayer sessions in all taken by the evangelists in turns. The Cathedral, according to Atiku, is an invocation of Oba Ovonramwen’s spirit who was a powerful force in the fight against the British during the Benin punitive expedition of 1897. The colours of the cathedral of Red and Gold signify Life and Wealth as exemplified in the rich artistic cultural heritage of Benin and the monarchs.



Fig. 6 Jelili Atiku as Prophet in *Holy Ovonramwen Cathedral*
Performed in Igun Street, Benin City On the 6th of December 2014
Photograph: Felix Osaigbovo

Through the Galloway treaty of 1892, the British started the process of desecration and destratification of Benin, thus becoming “*Oghian Oba*” (The Oba’s Enemy). In 1896, a British invasion force headed by Captain Philips set out to overthrow the Oba, Omo N’Oba Ovonramwen *Nogbaisi* who, according to Benin cosmology, was god in flesh and saddled with the responsibility of upholding the integrity of the people. Subsequently, a military action against

the people of the ancient city was launched in 1897 and, thus, the city was razed and the treasures of the palace looted. Uncountable numbers of the inhabitants were killed. Benin did not just go down without a fight. The British soldiers met with stiff resistance as they also suffered casualties. Finally, Oba Ovonramwen was captured, tried and exiled to Calabar where he finally died.

CONCLUSION

Performance art or Kineasthetics is an audience display performance in which the audience may or may not actively participate. It could also be unscripted or scripted. In most cases, it is performed live; it could be multi-media in the sense that electronic gadgets such as amplifiers, microphones and speakers might be employed. Performance Art involves so many props such as artworks of all types and live animals, for example, goats, donkeys and camels. Ventriloquism, as mentioned before in this paper, plays a huge part in the Performance Art of Atiku, whose philosophy of performance takes root from the *Egungun* (Masquerade) concept. Performance Art is a big money earner as practitioners are not restricted to any particular culture of the world. They can delve into the history and culture of any part of the world and, from there, formulate an idea that can engender Performance Art on that subject. Performance Art is universal and, because it highlights the very essence of living a purposeful life in various cultures, it is easily globally embraced. It gives birth to social, political and economic emancipation of a culture; therefore, this writer strongly recommends that this very versatile aspect of our visual culture be introduced as an independent study area in universities, not only in Nigeria but also in other parts of Africa and the rest of the world.

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