

## Comparative Analyses of the works of El Anatsui and Lamidi Lasisi

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### Abstract

**Keyword:** *El Anatsui, Lamidi Lasisi, Art works, Medium.*

*The aim of this study is to make a comparative analysis of the sculptural artworks of El Anatsui and Lamidi Lasisi, to be précised the artworks are four in number, two for each artist, they are El Anatsui: Drying Towels and Pant and Man's Cloth, while that of Lamidi Lasisi: Cultural Performance and Elegance II, respectively while the objectives are the medium of expressions and use of colour on their artworks. Observational and Survey method of research design is employed while data is analyze through descriptive method. Along with other similarities and differences, it was discovered that both artists are mixed media explorers which is assumed to suggest the richness and wealth of their artworks. Also it is believe this paper will serve as a source of document to scholars and inspire other artist and art critics alike.*

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### Introduction

In the contemporary sculptural practice, gone are the days when medium in Sculpture could be listed, medium in Sculpture varies and dwell more on the creative and exploratory ability of the sculptor/artist in general. According to

Adeyemo and Duniya (2016), “They define contemporary sculpture/ medium in contemporary sculpture as an artistic form in which hard or plastic materials are worked into three-dimensional art objects, and could be in the round (free standing), in relief on surfaces, or in environments ranging from tableaux to contexts that envelope the spectator. They push further to isolate and explain contemporary medium in sculpture sighting examples as “An enormous variety of media may be used, including clay, stone, metal, glass, wood, and randomly “found objects.”

While Ononeme (2010) breaks the yolk, “there are abundant expressive materials in our environment looking for the attention of sculptor/ artist to use them”. He also define the source of the medium by saying that, some of these potential artistic media were divinely located through the providence of God in their natural habitat while others have been used by man for various purposes and later abandoned thereby constituting nuisance in the environment. Osiboye (2017) testifies that, in sculpture these materials in most cases, are either scavenge around the environment or bought cheaply from the collectors. He stated further that scavenging for these materials may be a laborious task for some artist, but could be collected over time: hence, artist can buy these materials cheaply from the scrap market, as an alternative to scavenging.

The contemporary concept of artistic expression in line with exploring materials that are termed waste, even though, there have been negative assertions as reported by Okoli (2007) against the use of some materials, he says, are referred to as “waste” or “junk” but are wholly called ‘unconventional’. In this light, ‘Who or what determines conventional materials’? it seems that, such materials are not durable and their life may be short. Meanwhile, the 21<sup>st</sup> century exploration of materiality in sculpture, has allowed for broader spectrum of materials as sculptural medium.

In this light the study is an attempt to make a comparative analysis of two unique contemporary sculptor artists that explore materials found within and around their environment seeking for their attention as Ononeme (2010) has earlier imply. The names of the artist are El Anatsui and Lamidi Lasisi. The analysis will be carried along with two each of their identify artworks. For El Anatsui: Drying Towels and Pant and Man’s Cloth, while that of Lamidi Lasisi: Cultural Performance and Elegance II. A survey analysis will be carried out on their medium of expressions and use of colour on their artworks. Observational and

Survey method of research design is employed while data is analyzed through descriptive method of data analysis

### **El Anatsui (1944)**

He was born in Anyanko, Ghana in 1944. Art 21(2019), He received a BA from the College of Art, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana (1969) and since 1975 has taught at the University of Nigeria Nsuka. His works are in the public collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; British Museum, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris, among many others. Major exhibitions of his work have appeared at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown (2011); Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (2010); National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka (2010); Rice University Art Gallery, Houston (2010); Venice Biennale (2007); and the Biennale of Africa Art, Senegal (2006), El Anatsui lives and works in Nsuka, Nigeria.

### **Discussion of El Anatsui's Works Based on Medium and Colour**

It was discovered that many of Anatsui's sculptures are mutable in form, conceived to be so free and flexible that they can be shaped in anyway altered in appearance for each installation". This is as a result of the medium and method of attachment; this can be likened to a major characteristic of his work. Lori (2013), "The glittering multi-coloured murals by El Anatsui may look like they are made of precious metals, but a closer look will reveal that the mosaic bits are recycled bottle caps! He also said that, "the Nigerian base artist has building facades with his rich tapestries made from disused bottle caps, remnants metal and wire". Still on the medium, it was further inform that, "Anatsui sources bottle caps and seals from alcoholic drinks, many which he finds in garbage dumps near Nigeria distilleries. When Anatsui learned that Nigerian liquor companies throw out the seals and bottle caps when refilling liquor bottles, the artist struck a deal for steady source of materials".



Fig. 1

Artist: El Anatsui

Title: Man's Cloth.

Medium: Metal

Dimensions: Height: 297cm; Width: 374cm

Year: 2001

Source: Retrieved from <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collectio on=16343316part1d> May 25, 2019

El Anatsui's great exploration of different kinds of medium was also documented, Art 21 (2019), "Working with wood, clay, metal, caps of liquor bottles..." El Anatsui executed many works using recycled waste objects, while his exploits was also honoured, it was also mentioned that, El Anatsui breaks with sculpture's traditional adherence to forms of fixed shape while visually referencing the history of abstraction in African and European art."(Art 21, 2019),

Perhaps contrary to most views, El Anatsui (2011), "I don't see what I do as recycling: I transform the caps into something else". Probably his view was suggested because no chemical changes occur on the material been use, rather

it was just a physical change. According to Savannah (2017), “A physical change is any change in a substance’s form that does not change its chemical makeup. Examples of physical changes are breaking a stick or melting ice”. He also says that, “chemical change, or chemical reaction, occurs when atoms of a substance are rearranged, and the bonds between the atoms are broken or formed, during a chemical reaction, the structure or composition of the material changes.” He also concluded that, when a chemical change is completed, the resulting substance(s) is/are different from the original substance(s). As a result of a chemical reaction, new substances with new properties are formed. However, whichever way artists choose to use waste materials the most important thing is that, the artist must have recycled waste materials.



Fig. 2

Artist: El Anatsui

Title: Drying Towels and Pant

Medium: Aluminum en Koperdraad

Year: 2013

Source: Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/38891071@N00/9008759914> May 25, 2019

## Colour

The appearance of colours which perhaps is not a usual sight in sculptural works could or be sited as resent development in the contemporary sculpture practices.

Adeyemo and Duniya (2016), “This style paves way for variety and dislodges colour monotony, which is synonymous to sculpture” and Lori (2013), on El Anatsui work states that, “The resulting pieces sparkle in full colour- golds, reds and green fragments shimmer off one another. Only when examined closely do the mosaic elements betray their original use, when logos and words are visible”. Then it could be concluded that, the colours of his work are suggested by the colours of the object that is the material or medium been made used off. This appearance of colours is also perceived in Jean-Francois Glabik paper sculpture below (Fig. 3) and Osiboye Oluwaseun bone artworks (Fig.7) as observed justifying the words of Adeyemo and Duniya (2016) in the earlier submission. According to Orkhan (2012), “Jean-Francois Glabik modern sculpture artist and painter from France works with paper and metal to create his very own sculptures.



Fig. 3

Artist: Jean-Francois Glabik

Title: Unknown

Medium: Metal and Paper

Source: Retrieved from <https://freeyork.org/art/as...> May 26, 2019

It is perceived in his artwork above (Fig. 3) that the use of colour appears similar to that of El Anatsui in the sense that, it appears that the colours of the paper were not deliberately painted with any form of paint as it is observed in the work of Lamidi rather Jean-Francois Glabik worked on the natural colours of the material (paper) been used to achieve is concept, just the way Anatsui does with is medium of expressions

Lamidi Lasisi (1966)

Lasisi Lamidi was born in Bibiani, Ghana, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1966. His parents hail from Offa, Kwara state, and he is a graduate of Sculpture from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Lasisi's engagements at his alma-Mata earned him his First and Second Degrees, in 1990 and 1998 respectively. He had his Ph.D. in sculpture in 2015 also in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

His enlistment as lecturer in the same institution has culminated in a third romance. Since graduating, his exploratory artistic rendition has not been limited to modelling and paintings but, equally to a progressive exploit with the fluidity or the pliability of metal rod as a medium of sculptural interpretation. Equally evident of his artistic expedition is his craftsmanship in the way he has generated a new 'alloy' with metal rods and fabric in some of his canvas-draped metal artworks. He has had four one-man show and about 30 group exhibitions to his credit locally and international.

### **Discussion of Lamidi Lasisi Works base on Medium and Colour**

Observing the medium and material used in the making of Lamidi's Sculptural pieces; wood, fabrics, metal rods and plates can be described as found objects (Osiboye, 2017). Not purchased or with little price but joined together to bring out creative objects of Art. Also the artworks can be classified as mixed media. Stephanie (2019), "Mixed media techniques are those that combine different methods and mediums to make artwork." Not the combination of two different medium alone it involves both the combination of two or more different medium as well as the combination of two or more different methods of making an artwork. Duniya in Faida and Audu (2017) confirms that, "Lamidi is engaged in studio practice, and has held and attended several exhibitions, workshop, seminars and conference/ symposiums related to art, which have been a motivating him towards the use of different techniques, medium, styles and other improvised materials of his choice"



Fig: 4  
Agere Dancers.  
Retrieved from <https://thenationonlineng.net> June 23, 2019  
By Edozie, U. (2017).

The elongation effect that is achieved in his sculptural artworks is suggested by Yoruba stilt dancers. The physical structure and form of the human dancers were adopted into his sculptural forms. Adeyemo and Duniya (2016) testify that, “He has also just completed a Ph.D. programme in the same university,

researching on the Yoruba stilt dancer (*Agere*) for inspiration in sculptural possibilities.”



Fig. 5

Artist: Lasisi Lamidi

Title: Elegance II

Date: 2014-2015

Medium: (Mixed media) Found Objects, Mild steel, Canvas and Acrylic Paint

Size: 184cm high

Source: Lamidi Lasisi, 2017



Fig: 6

Artist: Lamidi Lasisi

Title: Cultural Performance

Medium: (Mixed media) Found Objects, Mild steel, Canvas and Acrylic Paint

Size: 115cm high

Year: 2012

Location: Osiboye Oluwaseun's Residence, Along FCE (T), Bichi, Kano state.

Photography by: Osiboye Oluwaseun

## Colour

Adeyemo and Duniya (2016), submits that, “another paramount factor to behold is the artist’s use of colours on the welded sculpture and the use of canvas to cover parts...” While Faida and Audu (2017) sees it that, “His love for paintings shown on the painted fabrics fixed on the iron rods, probably comes from the influence of his late Uncle Gani Odutokun, who was a proficient painter”. The colours observe on the Lamidi Lasisi artworks are in the shades of red, dark brown, yellow, green, blue etcetera. This appearance of colour looks similar to that of El Anatsui but differs as well in the sense that, that of El Anatsui came along with the medium, and in the case of Lamidi it was deliberate application by the artist, such colours like acrylic, gloss and oil colours are been used. The paintings were applied to achieve tonal graduation in certain parts of the figure, while some parts were painted flat. In an interview conducted by Adeyemo and Duniya (2016), it is reported that, “he tries to marry sculpture and painting in his expressions which is an innovation in artistic practice”. Lamidi artworks suggest a multidisciplinary approach in Fine Arts that is the combination of Painting and Sculpture. This is because of is deliberate attempt to apply colours to his sculptural artworks unlike the works of El Anatsui that relies on the natural colour of the object he is manipulating.

## Review of Similar Artworks



Fig. 7

Artist: Osiboye Oluwaseun

Title: Evil Mask Men: Terrorist

Medium: Grog, Ash, Bones (camel and cow), Calcium powder (with Resin, catalyst and accelerator) and Metals (scraps, flat bars and rods)

Dimensions: 2ft by 6ft

Year: 2019

Photograph by: Eshemogie Moses Bankole

The above sculptural artwork (Fig. 3) and (Fig. 7) are also observed to reflect the strong use of colours which appears not to be conversant in sculpture until recent times. Also in (Fig. 7) the “Evil mask men: Terrorist” from the medium in the legend it could be observed as mixed media artwork with different techniques and medium. Evil mask Men: Terrorist is an art piece that is made from different kinds of medium of expression even though camel and cow bones were elaborately used. Other medium observed in this mix media artwork are ash, grog, calcium powder (with resin, catalyst and accelerator) and metals of different kinds such as scraps rods and flat bars. The ash were used to create colourful impressions on the work such as gray, black, blue, olive green, green, purple while the orange colour impression was created through the use of grog. The bones appear inform of bone rings and bars that are engraved upon with different kinds of lines, while some of the bone bars are also embellish with holes. The work of art is a combination of a five pieces panel and in each of the panel appears a stylized cow head made from the mixture of calcium powder with resin. Due to the colour of the stylized cow head (off white); it is probably intended to suggest bone and to represent cow skull as well. The first two panel appear as the same size which is 2ft by 1ft followed by the third also the middle panel with a size of 2ft by 2ft followed by another set of two panels with the same size as the first two 2ft by 1ft. In conclusion the size of the entire artwork is 2ft by 6ft.

Still on colour, the act of marrying sculpture with painting can be likened to as an attempt of multidisciplinary approach in Fine Arts. The definition of “multidisciplinary” in English by Lexicon (nd) states that it is the combining or involving several academic disciplines or professional specializations in an approach to a topic or problem.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the works of Anatsui the artworks are extremely big and wide covering grounds while the works of Lamidi are concise compared to the work of El Anatsui. Another important fact to note is that both artists are mixed media explorers that suggest the richness and wealth of their artworks. The capricious forms and nature of Anatsui's sculptural artworks, gives room for the curator during an exhibition to be creative in the installation of the artworks. This capricious nature is due to the medium, techniques involve and the concept of the artist, it can be regard as major characteristics of El Anatsui sculptural artworks rather than a defect. What could have been assumed as defect in the works of Lamidi is the used of fabrics (cavass) with the thought that weathering will easily puts it apart, but overtime it was observe not to be. Then careful observation made on the fabric parts of the artworks made it know that the fabrics (cavass) are treated or protected fabrics against the threat of weathering thus increasing the longetevity of the sculptural artworks. Also it is believed this paper will serve as a source of reference to scholars and inspiration other artist and art critics.

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