

GENERAL EDUCATION JOURNAL; Vol. 7; 1 Issue 1; Pages 47-64; April 2017; Published By Mount Meru University Research Unit

**ABIODUN OLAKU: A RENOWNED LAGOS-BASED  
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN PAINTER**

**AUTHOR:** AUGUSTINE BARDI

**DATE RECEIVED:** 23/02/2017

**DATE PUBLISHED:** 28/04/2017

**JOURNAL NAME:** General Education Journal, Vol. 7 Issue 1

**e-ISSN:** 1821-9616

**PUBLISHER:** Mount Meru University

**EMAIL:** [enquiry@mmu.ac.tz](mailto:enquiry@mmu.ac.tz)

**CITY:** Arusha

**COUNTRY:** Tanzania

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Augustine Bardi, Associate Professor Department of Fine and Applied Arts  
University of Benin, Benin City. Email [bardi.austin@yahoo.com](mailto:bardi.austin@yahoo.com)

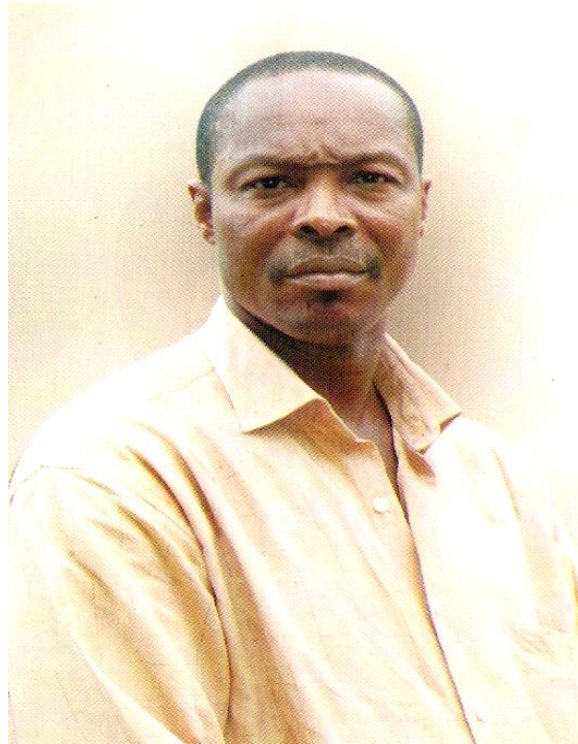
**Abstract**

Abiodun Olaku is a master painter who remains among the best in Nigeria and blessed with great power of draughtsmanship. Art and art objects attract different correspondence to different audiences. In some quarters, it is a subject that involves drawing and writing more, for some.. In other climes when the word is mentioned, it is interpreted as a figure making. Despite these narrow perceptions and a seemingly low patronage and promotion of the arts, artists undauntedly continue to define their professional ingenuity by specializing in Painting, Graphic, Design, Textiles, Metal Design, Sculpture, Ceramics and other areas within the arts. The paper focuses on the growth of painting in Nigeria. The objective being to scholarly document the life and times of Abiodun Olaku employing the biographic and formalistic methods of arts historical studies.

**Keywords:** *Drauhtsmanship, Objects, Perception, Patronage, Promotion of the Arts*

### **His Early Life/Education**

#### **Abiodun Olaku (b. 1958)**



**Plate 1: Abiodun Olaku.**  
© Universal Studios of Art.

Abiodun Olaku was born in Lagos on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 1958. He had his primary education at Alafia Institute, Ibadan in Oyo State and later at the Sunny Fields Primary School, Ibadan. He attended the Baptist Academy, Lagos, for his secondary education, and then studied at the Yaba College of Technology from 1976 to 1981, graduating with a Higher National Diploma (HND) in painting. As a child, he collected cartoons, and his favourite cartoon heroes were the Native American Indians who have their heads decorated with feathers of assorted colours. At a point, he made cartoons and comic strips of his own which he carried about to the admiration of those who came close to him and those who wanted to see the latest in his cartoon repertoire (Akaniro, 1998:15).

At home, he drew portraits of his family members, preferably his grandmother who was a strong supporter of his life career in the fine arts. He also sketched the figures of other friends of the family. Abiodun had a resounding encouragement from his parents, most especially from his mother who was an art critic. One of his earliest experiences and experiments were a series of charcoal drawings comprising largely of

various societal happenings, which portray people and their situation. He was a science student at the primary stage of his life, but his greatest success in the art has hung on his determination, hard work and dedication (Akaniro, 1998:16)

### **Profile**

During Abiodun's secondary school days, "he was fortunate to have good art teaching under Mr. Bili Koleosho, now an adjunct Professor of Architecture at the University of Lagos, and Mr. Lawal". (Olusegun, 2003:18). After his secondary school, he first worked as a Clerical Officer in the Ministry of Information, Lagos. At the same time, he further developed his skills through studio practice. During weekends, he spent some time with his artist-friends, drawing landscapes within his locality. To better his educational career, he enrolled at the Yaba College of Technology, Yaba to study painting 1976. Kolade Oshinowo was his lecturer on the fundamentals of colours.

After completing his Higher Diploma programme, Olaku's artistic prowess in painting improved. His style and method of colour application gave his paintings a good grade, and this opened doors of collaboration with many bodies, which included the Universal Studios of Arts located within the premises of the National Gallery of Art (NGA), Lagos.

### **His Studio Experiences**

At the Universal studios of Art, he improved on his artistic skills and quest for greater heights. Not getting full satisfaction by this development and successes so far, he joined the services of a group of "independent artists" not minding the challenges he would face as a beginner under the notable professionals. (Olusegun: 2003). At the studio, "his outstanding qualities made more students to register for training under the independent artists" (Olusegun: 2003) at this time also, student's registration for Industrial Training (I.T.) and other programmes showed how important and dynamic the Gallery's services were. Also put in place to make the services of the gallery effective and appreciated, were low cost accommodation provided for students from far and near. Abiodun's artistic knowledge even drew the attention of his colleagues at the Yaba College of Technology, who wanted him to teach in the college.

According to him, "I am influenced by great impressionist like Rembrandt, Renoir, Cezanne, Raphael, Chagall, Claude Monet, Eduardo Manet and the rest". (Olaku: 2011) as great impressionists, he continued, they all worked under masters as apprentices to improve their skills.

### **His Experimentation**

Olaku emphasizes colours on particular areas of his work". His works are usually in layers of colours, introducing images into them to convey expressionism. He has interest in landscape painting in which the effect of light and shade enhance the beauty of his works. His paintings are fascinating because they are like documentaries. Each work is a visual treat on culture; portraying landscapes, mood and events and

making them look real. Olaku's love for landscapes remains a passion, which he expresses without reserve and which art admirers praise, adore and purchase without hesitation. The intelligence at which he manipulates and places his colours, are of great advantage to the projects he executed as a professional. He indicates vividly without hesitation key areas of focus and concentration, which attracts the viewer making it impossible for them to locate other points, were likely comments would come from. (Okolo: 2000).



Plate. 2: People's Passage

Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2004.

© Universal Studios of Art

His themes and styles are focused on contemporary genre. His *People's Passage* (Plate 2) defines the effect of light not only on objects, but also on the results they give. He employs dark colours to create the effect of shade in the building, while using bright colours as emphasis on the objects within the passage, leaving the background with white hue that throws the image out at the foreground. *Peoples Passage* depicts a typical short-cut; that is, a passage that can easily cut short someone's long journey. The passage is wide opened without a door, and as such giving an easy access to all humans.



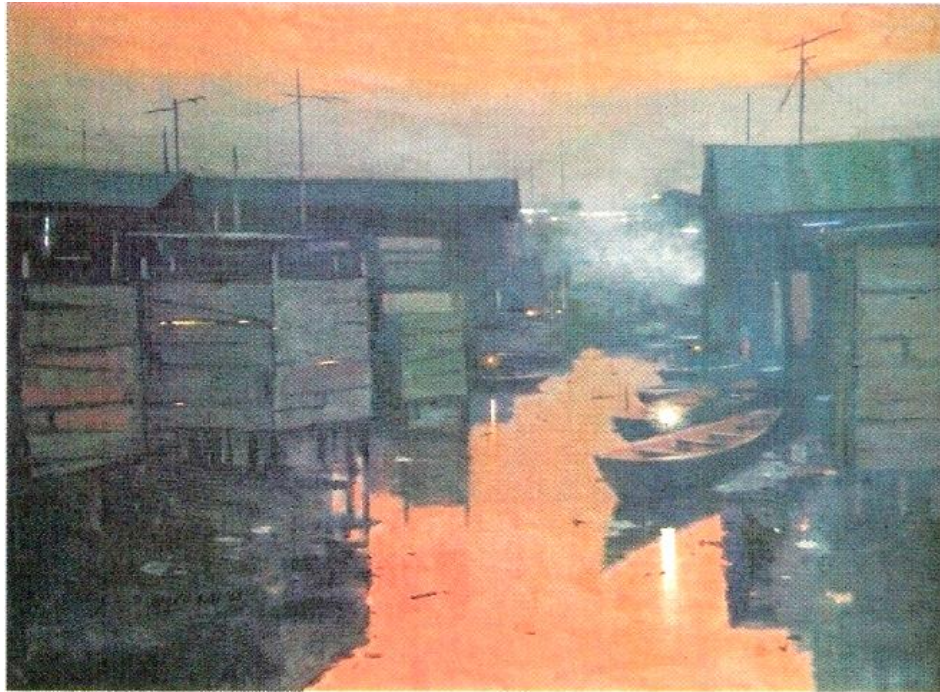


Plate 3: Communion with Okobaba.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2006.  
© Universal Studios of Art.

In his *Communion with Okobaba* (Plate 3), he continues his interesting and unending series of colour exploration and explosion with colour dominants. He manipulates, with care, the combination of deep ochre, black, cadmium red accompanied with white which defines twirling light at night. *Grey Mood* (Fig 4) is another creative and expressive use of colour harmony. The surging of isolated white light combines with creative forces of greenish patches to give a concentration of white at the background. Abiodun's collective expressive experience on canvas is inexhaustible.

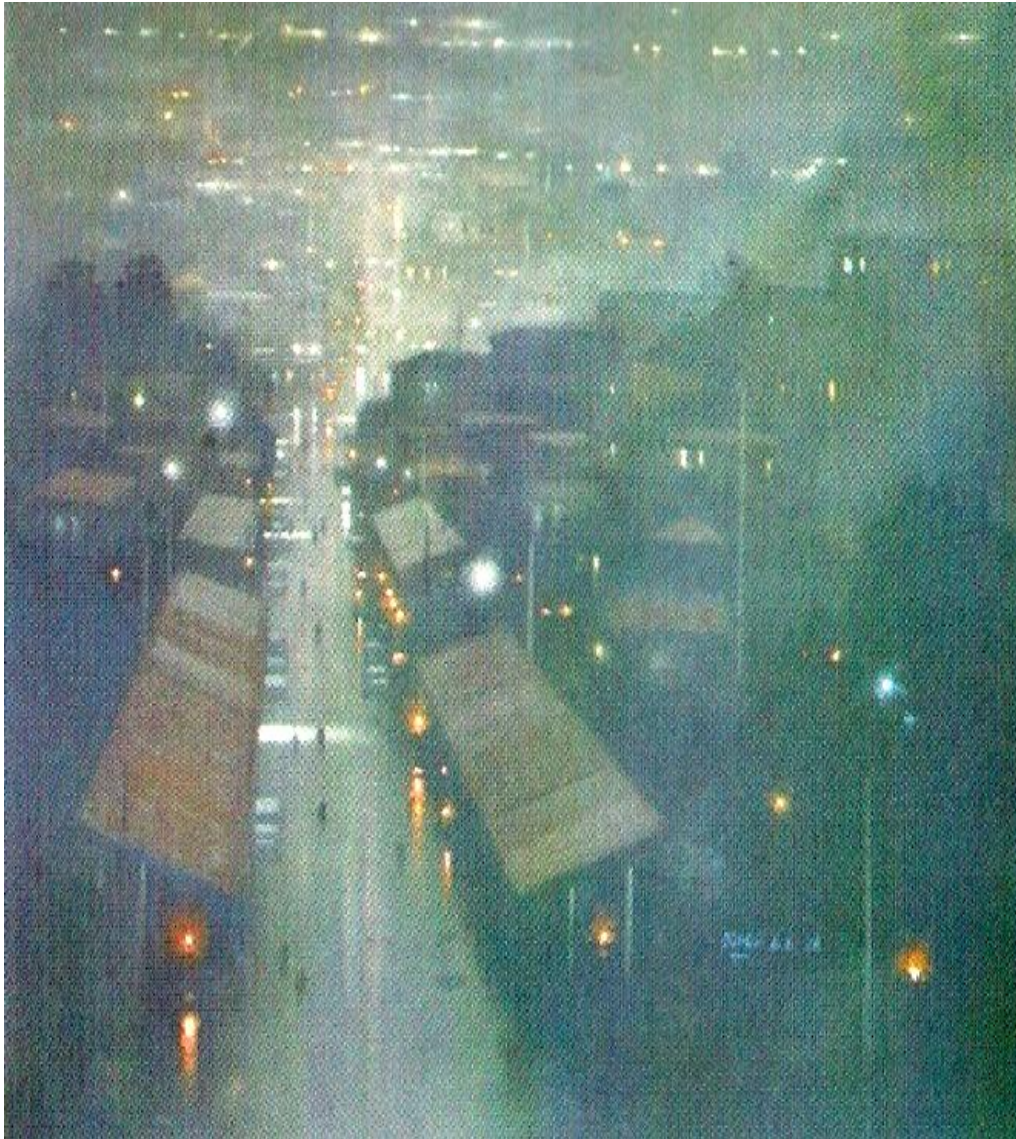


Plate 4: Grey Mood.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2006.  
© Universal Studios of Art





Plate 5: Quietude.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2007.  
© Universal Studios of Art.



Plate 6: Way Home.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2007.  
© Universal Studios of Art.



Abiodun Olaku uses quite subdued colours to express and convey the beauty of local scenery. One sees a rigorous continuation of an unending brush work in his paintings in realizing natural presentation. Olaku's colour exploration of slums in Lagos continues in *The Feel of Okobaba* (Plate 7).



Plate 7: The Feel of Okobaba.  
Abiodun Olaku. Oil on Canvas, 2009.  
© Olaku's library.

The *Okobaba* series have no doubt, given Abiodun's paintings great popularity among art admirers at home and abroad. His capability to distinguish and express the principles of distancing is most striking.

In the *Divine Retreat* (Plate 8), the artist uses colour combination to interpret the concentration of figures for a retreat. The flow of people and the use of movement to

distinguish between rhythm and balance create a perfect harmony. Over the years, Abiodun's focus on expressive representation of his works keeps improving.

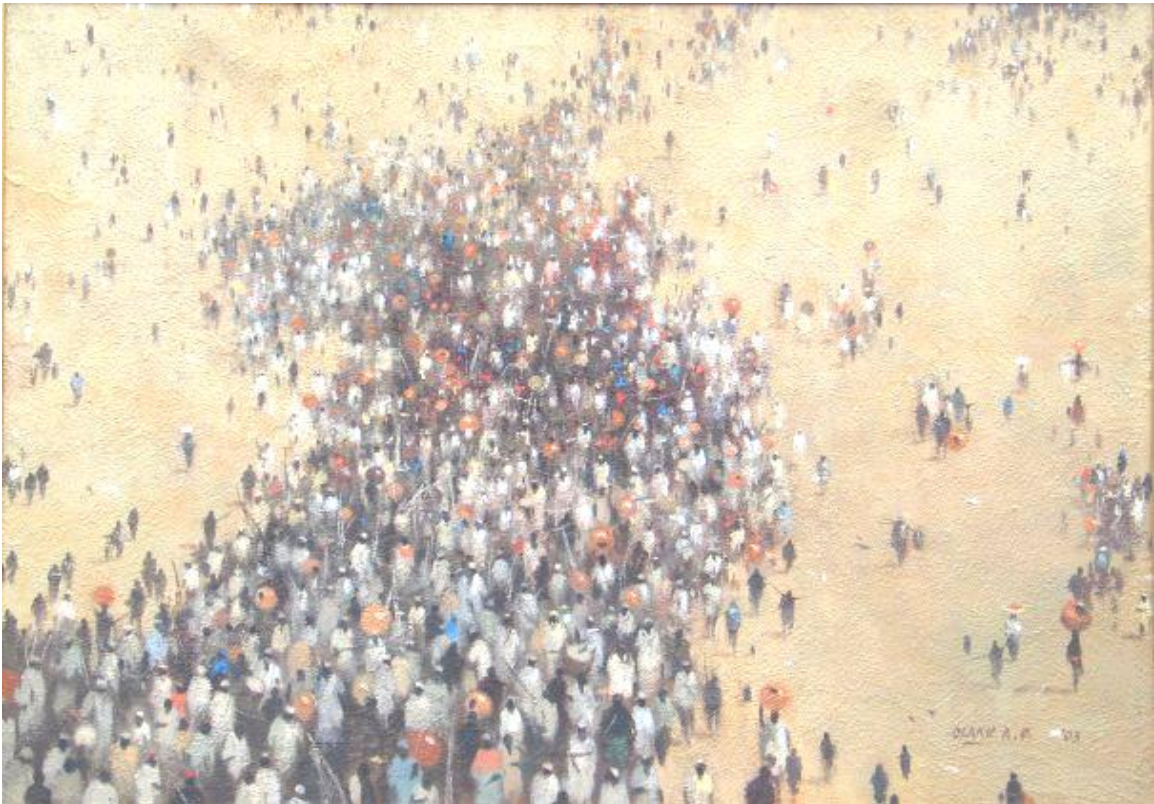


Plate 8: Divine Retreat.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2006.  
© Olaku's Library.



Plate 9: Untitled.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2006.  
© Olaku's library.

In *Untitled* (Plate 9) shows a traditional Durbar with men displaying their drums to entertain the men on camel backs at the background. Again, colour dynamism characterizes his works with or without figures. The artist captures interesting scenes that make his presentation unique and very interesting. His colour application is also appropriate and appealing in the *Untitled* (Plate 10) which shows a woman roasting plantain under an umbrella covered with thick smoke. With a superb reflection of the same image at the foreground. The bright yellow light fire at the base of the drum used for roasting is dominant, while the plantain displayed for prospective buyers is arranged on the side.





Plate 10: Untitled.  
Abiodun Olaku. Oil on Canvas, 2006.  
© Olaku's library.



Plate 11: Untitled.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2007.  
© Olaku's library.

The artist's untitled (Plate 11) shows one in search of perfection, through aesthetic manipulation of the flood prone areas of Lagos. This same formalistic achievement is seen in his Sunset (Plate 12).

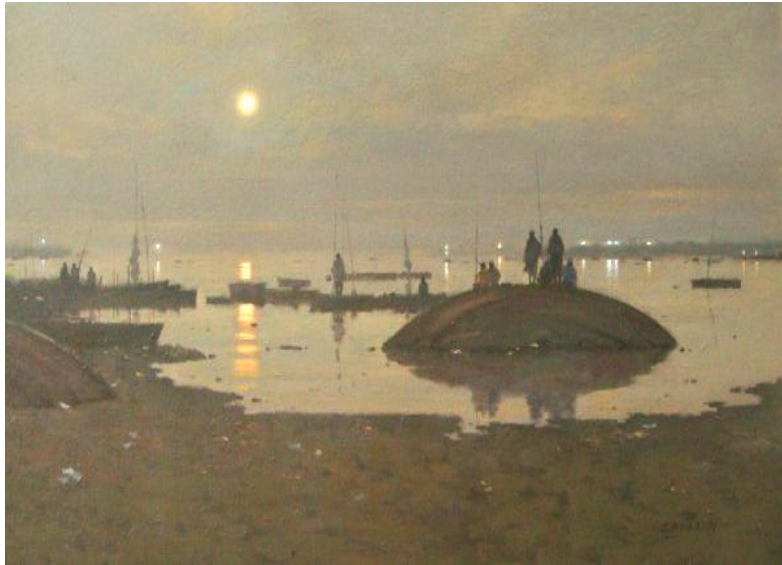


Plate 12: Sunset.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2007.  
© Olaku's library.



Plate 13: Just Before the Performance.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2007.  
© Olaku's library.



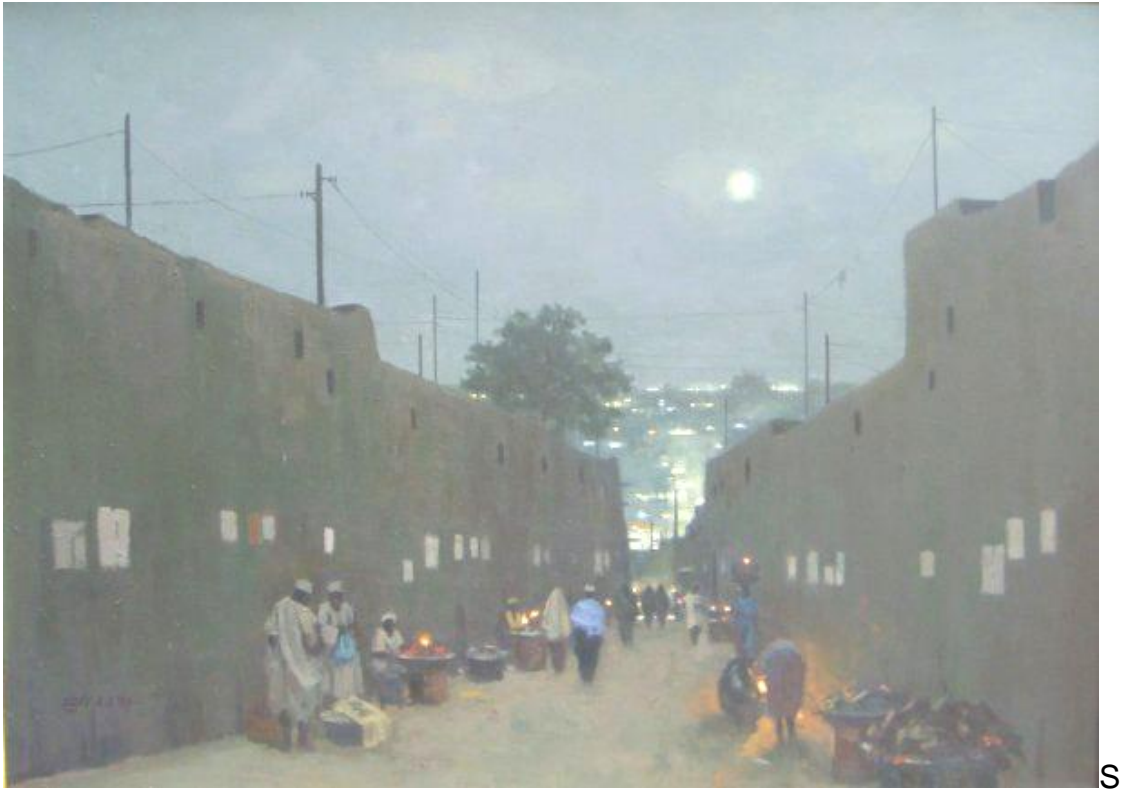


Plate 14: Dynamism.  
Abiodun Olaku, Oil on Canvas, 2008.  
© Olaku's library.

*Just Before the Performance* (Plate 13) highlights Abiodun Olaku's depiction of movement and agility on the part of entertainers, with a semi-circular formation, which adds beauty and shows the significance of entertainment. In *Dynamism* (Plate 14), he continues his exploratory mission on the Lagos Landscape. He employs and takes advantage of a setting sun in the horizon which reflects on both objects at the back ground and at the foreground. The divers' colours used gives beauty to this creative interpretation of *Dynamism*.

Abiodun has three solo exhibitions and he has participated in many group exhibitions, both locally and internationally. His professional affiliations include the Society of Nigerian Artists (S.N.A.), and the Guild of Professional Fine Artists of Nigeria (GPFAN). He is married with children and contemplates running a studio programme at a postgraduate level in future; a desire which he believes would further brighten his academic career to transfer his service to a university teaching career.

### **Conclusion**

The study reveals Abiodun Olaku's contribution to the growth of contemporary art in Nigeria. His aesthetic display in *Okobaba* series, the professional ways he treats the flood prone and water settlements areas of Lagos with manipulation of his colour distribution awakes an attraction of symphonies of colours that elucidate to the public a true interpretation of nature as it where, which explains better his works. His figures are particularly relevant to his paintings and these he has impacted on students on industrial and apprenticeship programme as career course at the Universal Studios of Art (USA). His experiences and experimentation from the National Gallery (NGA), bring to focus his versed knowledge which he has transmitted to the unemployed youth who passed through him either by studio practice, art workshop or through art talk.

### References

Akaniro, H. (1998), *Abiodun Olaku. The Painter*. An Unpublished Undergraduate Project, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, p.15.

Ibid., p. 16.

An interview with Abiodun Olaku (Painter), Universal Studios of Art, Lagos, September, 2011.

Okolo, B. (2000), "Communication Aspects of Artworks". *Emotan Journal of Fine and Applied Arts*. Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City. Volumes 1, No. 1. p. 126.

Olusegun, S. (2003), *Abiodun Olawale Olaku. A Painter*. An Unpublished Undergraduate Project, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin, Benin City. p.18.

Ibid., pp. 20-22.

Ibid.