

Analysis of Painting Experiments of Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime

Segun Oladapo ABIODUN¹ and Olugbenga Oladeji ABOKEDE^{2*}

Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology,
Ogbomoso, Nigeria

¹soabiodun@lautech.edu.ng,

^{2*}ooabokede@lautech.edu.ng



Abstract – The paper is an art experimental study of Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime. Eclectic nature of visual art has brought about various experimentations on material, theme, style and technique. These experiments have been initiated by individuals and groups with the intention of promoting Nigerian indigenous art. Many of such art experiments syntheses have attracted scholars' interest and published in local and international journals. Yet, there is dearth of research and publication on this painter and art educator. This study analyses Rukeme's family and education philosophy and art experiments from thematic, stylistic, media and technical perspectives. Finding reveals Noserime's painting experimental exploration in paint and non-paint media. His philosophy and choice of painting themes is hinged on African culture. This is hopefully to promoting African identity and sustaining indigenous cultural heritage. His art experiment has produced several art works; drawing, paintings and thermoplastic engravings, with stylistic prowess in latent realism, impressionism, expressionism, abstract, nillism, *Glucol* and 'Tenebrous drawing'. He has published and co-authored publications in drawing, painting and graphics. Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime has contributed significantly to the growth and development of contemporary Nigerian art. This study hoped its findings will provoke further scholarly interest on contemporary artists and Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime in particular.

Keywords – Art Experiments, Latent Realism, *Glucol*, Nillism, Tenebrous Drawing and Painting.

I. INTRODUCTION

Visual art experiments of techniques and styles with various materials in Nigerian formal and informal art institutions were development towards training visual artists. Goal of the training was to acquire art skills. The art skill was geared towards equipping and developing visual artists; and has resulted in various art styles (Abokede, 2011:1). Hence, emergence of individual style, new dynamic identities of visual art and artists sprang up (Akinde, Woods and Odeniyi, 2005:55). Some informal art workshops in Nigeria are Mbari School, Ibadan, Osogbo Experimental School, Mbari-Mbayo, Owerri and Ori-Olokun Cultural Centre, Ile-Ife among others. These informal art schools have trained non-literates on the usage of indigenous and Western art materials and techniques. Products of these informal art schools have also produced identifiable unique styles for each workshop. Formal art school's curriculum is designed in line with Western models of regular academic settings. Several Art movements have broken away from Western norms through Visual Art graduates of formal art schools (Ayodele and Akinde, 2008:20). Rationale for the new art movement was to produce unique indigenous African art works. (Marshall Mount, 1973:22; Filani, 1990: 160, Chukueggu, 1998: 220; Akinde, Woods and Odeniyi, 2008:55; Egonwa, 2011: 138-142; Abokede, 2017: 2).

Many artists have also experimented with different media, techniques and styles (Abokede, 2011; 2016; 2017; 2021 and Akinde, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022a, 2022b; and Kalilu and Akinde, 2022). Its objective was to develop peculiar techniques and styles, create personal or group identities and thereafter promote and preserve African culture and artistic heritage. Notable among

such experimental movements and workshops include Zaria Art Society, Agbarha Otor Harmattan Workshop, Ullism, Onaism and Araism among others (Akinde, Woods and Odeniyi 2008: 55).

Zaria Art Society known as Zaria Rebels was established in 1958 by graduates of Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology (now Ahmadu Bello University), Zaria. Products of this art school are Uche Okeke, Solomon Wangboje, Yusuf Grillo, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Simon Okeke to mention but few. These scholars strongly detested the philosophy of first generation western art education realists. They opined that it resisted freedom of creativity. Therefore, they advocated for a synergy that should reflect old and new tendencies and promote African culture heritage (Adepegba, 1998: 30 and Chukueggu, 1998: 13-14; Kalilu and Abokede 2023:28-41; Ajadi and Akinde, 2019:13-14).

A group of academics from Nsukka Art School established Ullism movement. The art movement transformed traditional Igbo body decorations and wall paintings into contemporary *Uli* linear design. Uche Okeke was the leader of the movement. Few among other prominent members of the group are Chike Aniakor, Oseloka Osadebe, Chuka Amaefunnah, Obiora Udechukwu. These Uli artists experimented with traditional *Uli* motifs in drawing and other genres of visual art. Result of the experiment is visual art identity and ideology which Nsukka Art school is popularly known for (Ngumah, 2009: 48-49 and Egonwa, 2011: 142; Akinde and Abiodun, 2019: 103).

Onaism was coined from Yoruba word *onà* meaning design, decoration and aesthetics. It is an experimental product of a group of graduates, scholars, practicing artist, historians and art teachers from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. These scholars advocated for application of motifs, designs and embellishments of traditional Yoruba artworks on the contemporary art pieces in order to preserve and promote Yoruba art and culture. Onaism was officially unveiled on February 20, 1989 through an art exhibition organized by some of the foundation members such as Moyo Okediji, Kunle Filani, Tola Wewe, Bolaji Cambell and Babatunde Nasiru. Prominent artists and scholars of the Department of Fine Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife featured in the inauguration exhibition. They include Babatunde Lawal, Ojo, Ibigbami, Agbo Folarin, Olapade, Asaku-Gyapon and Akinola. The exhibition was described as “the humble beginning of a renaissance of art in Ife” (Wewe, 1990: 151-159 and Filani, 1990:160-174; Akintonde et al, 2015: 219-220).

Bruce Onobrakpeya is a member of Zaria Rebel and the founder of Ovuomaroro Studio and Gallery and Agbarha Otor Harmattan Workshop. He developed a bronze lino technique in 1968. The lino technique incorporates low-relief linoleum with bronze coating. In 1972, he experimented on another technique called ‘plastocast’. Plastocast is a process whereby plates were cast in plaster for deep etching (Ogumor, 2007: 165-166, Chukueggu, 1998: 111-118 and Akinde, 2019: 113-120).

Mufu Onifade also began visual art experiment on a technique called Araism in 1989. He formally launched the art technique in 1998 with a solo exhibition. The art technique thereafter metamorphosed into an art movement in 2006 with a group exhibition. Five of his disciples participated in the exhibition. Araism is an African painting technique that entails usage of inter-related cracked black lines to create rhythmic philosophical and aesthetical designs all over the surface pictures and picture plains. Araism’s philosophy is on Yoruba word “*àrà*” meaning wonder. It articulates an artistic expression and application known as Aesthetically Rich Art in which its acronym is “ARA”. The progressive movement trains young artists who incorporates the technique into personal style and thereafter produce art works called araism (Ara Studio, 2015:8; Onoja, 2015:13 and Akinde, Woods and Odeniyi 2008: 54-65).

Various artists that have experimented with various media, styles and techniques. The experiments have been documented in several research studies. Akinde (2002) examines the contribution of Rom Kalilu to Contemporary Nigerian Art. It gave credence to Kalilu’s effort on curriculum development and trajectory in the arts and administration. Abokede’s (2011) studio experiment is on contour generated paintings. Fajimi (2012) examines the material usage trends in painting both in formal and informal art schools among selected contemporary artists in Lagos. Akano (2012) studied four contemporary Nigerian painters vis-à-vis the analysis of their themes and styles. Their painting themes reflect social norms, belief, culture, folktales, political and cultural heritage. The artists he studied are Adisa Abiola Ellis Oyekola, Oshinowo Kolade and Mufu Onifade. Abokede’s (2016) work is a thematic examination of contour generated paintings with a reference to the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria. Analysis of the contour generated paintings cut across cultural, social, religious and economic issues. The study demonstrates validity of a creative approach called contour paintings. Adetimilehin (2016) analyse themes and styles of Ghariokwu Kemi’s ‘afro- Art Beat’ paintings. Ibikunle (2015) focuses on the biography, painting themes, styles and techniques of Muraina Oyelami and his contributions to contemporary Nigerian art. Muraina Oyelami is a painter from the informal art school

who experiments with Yoruba architecture motifs and anonymous portrait paintings. Adekunle's (2019) work is an artistic documentation of drawings and paintings of Duke Emuyenwomano Asidere. Asidere's paintings address contemporary societal concerns such as poor housing and infrastructure, African politics and women. He also experiments with diverse media and techniques. His style revolves around expressionism, impressionism and abstract.

Abina (2019) analyze painting experiments of Olu Ajayi with reference to theme, style, media and techniques. The study reveals that Ajayi's painting themes revolves around socio-political commentary. The style cut across realism, naturalism, impressionism, expressionism and abstract. Several other academic publications abound on art style, experiments, techniques, movements of reputable artists in Nigeria. Among them are Adebajo (2008), Olaniyan (2008), Taliat (2009), Lawal (2009), Babatunde (2011), Bayode (2012), Oweware (2012), Oyedele (2016), Alagbede (2016), Oyewobi (2019), Awolola (2019), Akinlabi (2019), Kasali (2019) and Akinde (2022).

The paper is an art experimental analysis of Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime overtime. However, there is dearth of scholarly attention on the life, works and artistic experiments of Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime. It is of high necessity to document this viable information before it is lost in vicissitude of time. This study therefore examines his family and educational backgrounds, art experiments from media, theme, style and technical perspectives.

II. FAMILY AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime, a contemporary Nigerian painter and Art educator was born on October 25, 1958 in Warri Delta State. His parents are Late Reverend John Noserime Thomas and Late Mrs. Christiana Lucky Oruwvieagone Thomas. He is a native of Ekpan in Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime's father was contemporary of Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onabrakpeya, S. A. Adetoro, Kolade Oshinowo and T. A. Fasuyi. Late Rev. John Noserime Thomas graduated from Nigerian College of Art and Science (now Ahmadu Bello University), Zaria in 1961 specializing in Commercial Design and Graphics Art. He proceeded to Goldsmith College of Arts, University of London for postgraduate Diploma in Commercial and Graphics Arts in 1962. He returned to Nigeria and worked as an art tutor at the following schools: Iganmode Grammar School, Otta, Ogun State between 1963-1965; Igbobi Grammar School, Igbibi, Fadéyi, Lagos between 1965-1973; and Federal Government Secondary School, Ilorin between 1973-1983. John Noserime Thomas was not a full time studio artist. Nevertheless, he produced several commissioned art works. (Noserime and Noserime, 2017: 6-37). Hence, wealth of experience of Late Rev. John Noserime Thomas as a trained artist, art teacher and practicing artist has direct influence on his son Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime. So, Rukeme was invariably exposed to visual art practices from his tender age.

Rukeme started elementary education at L.C.C. Municipal Primary School, (now Fadéyi Primary School) Onayade Street, Fadéyi, Lagos, Nigeria between 1967 and 1972. He had secondary and Higher School Certificate (HSC) education at Igbobi College, Igbobi-Yaba, Lagos and Federal Government College, Ilorin between 1972-1976 and 1976-1979 respectively as a science student. He enrolled for Independent Joint Matriculation Board (IJMB) in Science subjects at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1980. He was a science student, but his family background influenced him to study Fine Arts at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1981 through direct entry admission. Rukeme specialised in Painting and Wall Decoration. So, he obtained Bachelor of Arts (B.A. Hons.) Fine Arts in 1984 with Second Class Upper Division. He enrolled for postgraduate studies at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1991 and graduated with Master of Art in Visual Arts. He also bagged Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Fine Arts with specialisation in Painting from Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria in 2018.

He worked as art tutor at Itire Community Secondary School, Surulere, Lagos between January and March, 1986. He later moved to Department of Fine Art, Yaba College Technology, Lagos the same 1986 where he teaches Painting, Drawing, Art History, Mixed Media and Basic Aesthetics. He served as Head of Department of Fine Art, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos between 1996 - 1998 and 2007 – 2008; Dean, School of Art, Design & Printing Technology, Yaba College of Technology, between 1999-2002 and 2009-2012. He also held several academic and administrative positions and it is worthy of note that Rukeme is the first to serve as Dean for four (4) terms of eight (8) years in the School of Art, Design and Printing Technology since its inception in 1972.

Rukeme served as external assessor, examiner and moderator to some Polytechnics and Colleges of Educations. He was also a resource person to National Board of Technical Education (NBTE) on accreditation of Art & Design programmes in several Nigerian Polytechnics. He was an Editorial and Visual Consultant as well as resource person to some institutions, corporate and governmental organisations. He is a member of various art professional bodies such as Society of Nigeria Artists (SNA); Art Scholars Initiative (ASI), Nigeria; International Association of Artists (I.A.A.), Paris, France; Art Council African Studies Association (ACASA), U.S.A; and a Board Member Youth Festival on African Heritage (AFROFEST).

Rukeme is eclectic in his artistic practice. He drew his themes from several African and Nigerian cultural heritages. He experiments with diverse materials such as graphite, vinyl, stained thermoplastic engraving and *Glucol* panels. As an Art teacher, scholar and studio artist, he inspires several young artists through his teaching, publications and art exhibitions. He had three solo exhibitions, about forty-five group exhibitions, numerous commissioned works.

III. ART EXPERIMENTS

Rukeme Noserime started painting experiments in 1988. Aim of the experiment is to explore painting and non-paint media and through it evolve personal style and technique. African themes drive his artistic philosophy with a view to promote African identity and sustain indigenous cultural heritage.

Theme

Rukeme Noserime's painting themes are diverse. It cut across African traditional, social and economic life. Specific themes are: *Ara, The Mystery and the Talking Drum; Omotola... Pious, courageous and ever focused; Flood Imagery (Gossip); Idumota; The Gathering of Elders; Underwater Dynamism; Greenly Spirited; Behold the Red Zone; Reminiscent of Motifs (The Nile and Fulani); Royalty: from Nile to Epeland; Free at Last; Fulani Graduer; Happy Couple; African Fertility; African Stock Idiophone; Onshore/ Offshore; Reminiscent of knowledge* and *Sisi Èkó* among others. He explored several available visual art materials but due to his scientific background, he also produced art works with thermoplastic (vinyl) sheets and found objects. Rukeme's artistic experimentations are on styles, materials and techniques of production.

Styles

Rukeme employ various styles in his artworks. Latent realism, expressionism, abstract expressionism and nillism are some of the obvious styles in his art works. Rukeme uses a style which he described as latent realism. Latent realism according to him is an in-depth representation of people and objects in realistic form with embellished imaginary psychological expressions. Latent-realism is similar to expressionism style. This neo-experimental style dominates his graphite drawings, which incorporates philosophically expressions to realistic images (plates 1 and 2). *Ara: The mystery and the talking drum* is a figure of a lady posed with talking drum hang around her waist. The female figure twists her long braided hair around the strings of a talking drum, perhaps to produce a melodious sound.



Plate 1
Ara, The Mystery and the Talking Drum,
2006, Graphite, 30cm x 60cm.



Plate 2
Omotola... Pious, Courageous and Ever Focused, 2006, Graphite, 50cm x 60cm.

He also uses abstract expressionism. Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime's abstract expressionism manifests action painting. Subject of the painting represents societal and cultural phenomena. This is evident in his paintings: *Flood Imagery* (plate 3), *Idumota* (plate 4), *Gathering of Elders* (plate 5), *Underwater Dynamism* (plate 6) among, others.



Plate 3
Flood Imagery (Gossip), 1988, Oil on Canvas, 60cm x 120cm.



Plate 4
Idumota, 1989, Oil on Canvas,
60cm x 90cm.



Plate 5
The Gathering of Elders, 1995
Oil on Board, 45cm x 75cm.



Plate 6
Underwater Dynamism, 1992, Oil on Canvas, 60cm x 120cm.

Some of his paintings were rendered in expressionism style. Examples are *Behold the red zone* and *Greenly Spirited* (Plate 7 and 8). Painting titled *Greenly Spirited* expresses vegetable sellers. Medium of expression is gouache. Dominant colour is green complimented with red and other cool colours. *Behold the red zone* in warm colours depicts pepper sellers under umbrella in hot sun.



Plate 7
Greenly Spirited, 1998, Guouache,
60cm x 90cm.



Plate 8
Behold the Red Zone, 1997,
Oil on Canvas, 90cm x 120cm.

Rukeme started a stylistic experiment in painting in 2007 known as Nillism. Nillism according to him is a fusion of Nile influenced art values with other African cultures. In the experiment, he combines Egyptian and African cultural identities. Egypt remains the cradle of civilization. But the civilization later diffuses to other part of the world. Rukeme's nillism experiment adopts 'River Nile philosophy'. The philosophy expresses that River Nile is the source and energy of Egypt civilization. This is as a result of its abundant mineral resources, wealth and sustainability of the kingdom (Brommer, 1997: 160). In *Reminiscent of Motifs (The Nile and Fulani)*, Egyptian wine servers (plate 9) were rendered in frontal pose. The posture is strongly associated

with Egyptian art (Brommer, 1997: 162). The work also depicts Fulani milk seller and other Nigerian traditional motifs. In the same vein, *Royalty I: From Nile to Epe land* (plate 10) is a representation of royal institutions of Egypt and Epe land in Lagos State, Nigeria.



Plate 9
Reminiscence of Motifs (The Nile and Fulani).
2007, Thermoplastic Engraving, 208cm x 75cm.



Plate 10
Royalty I: From Nile to Epeland, 2020,
Thermoplastic Engraving, 210cm x 90cm.

The ideology is to compare abundant natural resources, economy and cultural values River Nile (Egypt) with that of Epe land. The art piece is thermoplastic engraving. It depicts Pharaoh and Oba of Lagos, their royal paraphernalia cultural and symbols and motifs richness of the kingdoms as giants of Africa. Background embellished various embossed effects through adhesive.

Media and Techniques

Rukeme conceived and developed a technique of painting immediately after his one year compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) exercise in Lagos. The process is by mixing glue and colour (Glucol) in 1985. *Glucol* experiment by Rukeme serves both media and technique of painting. Rukeme creates bas-relief and painting on canvas through a synthesis of media, glue and colour. Hence, *Glucol* is the art of using glue mixed with vinyl, reinforced cellulose compound to draw on canvas in order to give the bas-relief tactile feeling before applying colours. Vinyl reinforced cellulose compound is usually achieved by crushing and grinding vinyl polymer materials into powdery substance. *Glucol* panels are usually produced on hard surfaces such as masonite boards, reinforced and treated plywood for proper reinforcement. *Free at last* (plate 11) is one of his first set of experiment on this media *Glucol*. *Filani Graduer* (plate 12) is an example of development on the technique over time.



Plate 11
Free at Last, 1986, Glucol Panel,
90cm x 120cm.



Plate 12
Fulani Graduer, 1989, Glucol Panel,
120cm x 180cm.

Stained Thermoplastic Engraving

Rukeme produces stained thermoplastic engraving, which is a development on commonly known linoleum with vinyl reinforced sheets. The use of linoleum popularly known as lino as a medium of engraving in Nigerian art is a well established practice by artists such as Irein Wangboje, Bruce Onobrakpeya Herbert David Dale and Tayo Aiyegbusi (Chukueggu, 1998). Rukeme Noserime, highlights that scarcity and high cost of linoleum in the mid-1990s led to several experimentations in search of alternative medium of engraving. However, it is worth noting that Inyang Nse-Abasi, who was Rukeme's classmate in Zaria, and one time studio assistant to Bruce Onobrakpeya exposed him to the usage of this alternative materials for engraving (Rukeme 2020).

Rukeme also experiments with thermoplastic especially polyvinyl chloride (PVC). He adopted PVC floor tiles which are vinyl composition ($\text{CH}_2=\text{CH}$) as his engraving medium. Rukeme opines that thermoplastic gives deep linear engraved delineations than linoleum which creates embossed effects.

In Rukeme's stained thermoplastic engraving, imagery are drawn with pencil and engraved out prior the metallic surface painting. The sheets are neatly joined together with evostick gum depending on the size and thickness of the artwork. Inking is the process of painting engraving globally. So, he employs printing ink for his thermoplastic engraving. The thermoplastic surface is painted with gold, silver, copper or lemon gold dusts mixed with wood vanish. Rukeme enhances his thermoplastic engravings with varieties of embossed effects. He achieved this by using adhesive such as aradite or ema-glue to create variety of bas-reliefs around the figure and picture plain. Thereafter, jùtè sack or thick cloth like jeans surface is coated with metallic printing ink. Preferred colour mixture is dark green and black in the ratio of 3:1. Rukeme (2020) highlights that he employs dark-green colour in order to create copper acetate ($\text{C}_2\text{H}_3\text{O}_2\text{H}_2\text{O}$) effect of verdigris. Dark green colour is wiped off when the work is still wet. However, the engraved grooves retain dark green colour because they are very thin. The metallic gold surface becomes greenish and the grooves appear blackish. It gives antique corrosion effects on copper and brass of gold (plate 13-15). Other colours are applied to certain parts for emphasis and to represent certain identity (plates 10 and 16). The engraved piece is also covered with paper and lightly sprayed with kerosene to brighten the surface.



Plate 13
Happy Couple, 1995, Thermoplastic
Engraving, 30cm x 45cm.



Plate 14
African Fertility, 1997, Lino
Engraving, 30cm x 90cm.



Plate 15
African Stuck Idiophone, 1996 thermoplastic engraving,
90cm x 150cm.



Plate 16
Onshore/Offshore, 1997, thermoplastic engraving,
90cm x 150cm.

Tenebrous Drawing

This is expression of creative drawing in high density tenebrous effects. It enhances the concept of socio-cultural aspect of man, his society and belief systems through chiaroscuro technique. Rukeme's drawing uses light and shade to express realism and abstract expressionism style. This is exemplified in *Reminiscent of Knowledge* (plate17) which is portraiture of Professor Wole Soyinka, the winner of Noble Laurel Award in Literature in the year 1986 and an icon of knowledge. The portraiture is directly against dark background giving contrast to head with greyish hair and beard. Droplets of rain also reflect on the portrait

and picture plain. This art piece justifies a Yoruba saying: *Nínú ikikò dúdú ni èko funfun ti n jáde* (black pot produces white pap). It points to the fact that knowledge can come from anywhere even in the dark. *Sisi Èkó* (plate 18) is another drawing that reflects fashion trends among ladies in Lagos metropolis in the early 2000s. The drawing depicts a lady that is gorgeously dressed with elaborate hair-do and bangles among other fashion trend of the era. The drawing was treated with adequate light and shade as well as high tenebrous effects.



Plate 17
Reminiscent of Knowledge, 2005,
Graphite, 60cm x 90cm.



Plate 18
Sisi Èkó, 2005,
Graphite, 60cm x 90cm.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper examines biography and art experiments of a contemporary Nigerian artist, Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime. The research assesses his family and educational background. Eclectic traits in art experiments of Rukeme Noserime could be attributed to contact with several cultures, exposure to formal education and academic experiences. His art experiments in painting explore paint and non-paint media. His philosophy and choice of painting themes is anchored on African culture. This is with a view of promoting African identity and sustain indigenous cultural heritage.

Rukeme has contributed significantly to the development of contemporary Nigerian art. He taught, imparted, inspired, and encouraged several students in his teaching career. Through his tutelage, several students have acquired and developed artistic skill and personal styles. Rukeme contributions contemporary Nigerian art can be likened to a Yoruba maxim:

*Bí onírèsé kò bá fín 'gbá mó,
Èyí tí ó ti fín kò le è parun."*

'If a calabash carver refuses to carve more gourd,
Those ones he had carved will be a legacy.'

He has produced several artworks (drawings, paintings, thermoplastic engravings) which have been acquired by several individuals, corporate organisations and institutions. He employs various styles in his painting experiments; latent realism, impressionism, expressionism, abstract and nihilism. He has also experimented and developed some other styles and techniques of painting which include *Glucol*, thermoplastic engraving and 'Tenebrous Drawing' among others. Beside the artistic experiments, he has published and co-authored publications in drawings, paintings, and graphic works. However, these styles and techniques require to be given adequate and wide publicity in contemporary Nigerian art. This could be achieved through periodic art seminars, conferences, workshops, exhibitions and academic publications. It will assist to widen the scope of the experiment and educate more artists on the styles and techniques. This will also encourage more artists that would have interest in adopting and experimenting the styles and techniques as well as developing new ones. The study hopefully will provoke further scholarly interest on contemporary artists and Rukeme Ufuoma Noserime in particular.

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