



AN APPRAISAL OF LINOCUT PRINTMAKING IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY IN ZARIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, KADUNA STATE, 1998-2022

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Abstract

This study explores the historical and artistic evolution of linocut printmaking in Nigeria, focusing on Zaria, Kaduna State, from 1998 to 2022. The research examines the emergence and establishment of linocut as a prominent visual language in the Nigerian art scene, particularly within the context of the Zaria Art School. The study adopts a qualitative historical methodology, employing primary sources such as interviews with artists, original artworks, and archival materials, as well as secondary sources like published books and journal articles. This approach traces the influence of pedagogical philosophies like Natural Synthesis and the contributions of notable artists and educators who shaped the Zaria printmaking tradition. Findings reveal that linocut printmaking in Zaria served as a tool for artistic expression, socio-political commentary, cultural identity, and accessible education. From its early roots in the late 1990s to its expansion into experimental practices in the 2010s, linocut contributed significantly to the diversification and democratization of Nigerian visual art. The study affirms Zaria's historical role as a creative and pedagogical hub in modern Nigerian art, contributing to the growing discourse on African printmaking. By examining the trajectory of linocut printmaking in Zaria, this research provides valuable insights into the evolution of Nigerian art and its relevance to broader art historical narratives. The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of linocut printmaking's role in shaping Nigerian art, highlighting its potential for artistic innovation, social commentary, and cultural expression. Ultimately, this research enriches our understanding of Nigerian art's diverse and dynamic landscape.

Keywords: *Linocut, Printmaking, Nigeria, Zaria, Kaduna*

Introduction

Linocut printmaking, a relief printing technique, has played a significant role in Nigerian art since the 1960s (Afolabi, 1967). Zaria, Kaduna State, has been a hub for artistic innovation, fostering the growth of linocut printmaking. This study explores the historical development of linocut printmaking in Nigeria, focusing on Zaria from 1998 to 2022. In the 1960s, Nigerian artists like Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko introduced linocut techniques, influenced by European modernism (Oshinowo, 1975). The Zaria Art Society, established in 1958, provided a platform for artists to experiment with new techniques, including linocut printmaking (Oguibe, 1993). By the 1990s, Zaria had become a centre for artistic excellence, with the establishment of the Ahmadu Bello University's Fine Arts Department (Abdullahi, 2010). This department nurtured talented artists, who contributed to the evolution of linocut printmaking. The period between 1998 and 2022 saw significant developments in linocut printmaking in Zaria. Artists explored new themes, techniques, and materials, reflecting the changing Nigerian socio-cultural landscape (Uwaezuoke, 2004). This study aims to document and analyze this critical period in Nigerian art history.



Historical Overview and Evolution of Printmaking in Nigeria

Linocut printmaking in Nigeria has a rich history that dates back to the 1920s. During this period, European colonialists introduced linocut printmaking to Nigeria as a means of producing posters, advertisements, and other printed materials. The introduction of linocut printmaking was part of the broader colonial project of modernizing and Westernizing Nigerian society. However, Nigerian artists soon began to adapt and appropriate linocut printmaking for their own purposes, using it to express their cultural heritage and traditions (Korinya & Akran, 2025). The early years of linocut printmaking in Nigeria were marked by the use of traditional techniques and materials. Nigerian artists, who were mostly self-taught, used linocut printmaking to create artworks that reflected their cultural heritage and traditions. For example, the works of Aina Onabolu, one of the earliest known Nigerian linocut printmakers, were influenced by traditional Yoruba art forms. Onabolu's linocut prints, such as "Yoruba Woman" (1925), featured intricate designs and patterns that reflected traditional Yoruba textiles and woodcarvings (Korinya & Akran, 2025).

The 1940s and 1950s saw an increase in the number of Nigerian artists experimenting with linocut printmaking. Artists such as Ben Enwonwu and Uche Okeke began to explore the possibilities of linocut printmaking, creating innovative and dynamic artworks that reflected the changing social and cultural landscape of Nigeria (Michael, 1970). Enwonwu's linocut prints, such as "Anyanwu" (1945), featured bold and colorful designs that reflected traditional Igbo art forms. Okeke's linocut prints, such as "Uli" (1950), featured intricate designs and patterns that reflected traditional Igbo textiles (Grillo, 1965).

The early years of linocut printmaking in Nigeria were also marked by the establishment of art schools and institutions. The Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, established in 1952, was one of the first institutions to offer training in linocut printmaking. The college's art department, headed by Ben Enwonwu, provided a platform for Nigerian artists to learn and experiment with linocut printmaking (Jose, 2012). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, printmaking continued to evolve in Nigeria, with artists experimenting with new techniques and materials.

The period between 1998 and 2005 represents a formative stage in the historical development of linocut printmaking in Zaria, Kaduna State. Rooted in academic training and institutional frameworks, linocut during these early years emerged from a confluence of pedagogical structures, ideological revival, and artistic experimentation. As Nigeria transitioned from military rule to democracy in 1999, this change fostered renewed artistic freedom and engagement, allowing artists and students in Zaria to explore expressive forms such as linocut that were accessible, bold, and ideologically potent (Korinya & Bazza, 2025).

At the core of this early development was the Department of Fine Arts at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, which had long been a crucible for modern Nigerian art since the 1960s. By 1998, the printmaking unit had begun to emphasize relief printing techniques including woodcut and linocut as a distinct area of studio practice. Linocut, in particular, offered a simpler, less equipment-intensive alternative to other methods like etching or lithography, making it ideal for experimentation and mass visual communication. This period was characterized by a didactic approach to linocut as a means of mastering composition, contrast, and form. Under the guidance of lecturers such as Dr. Adamu Jibril and Mr. Musa Ibrahim, students were encouraged to develop their visual language through block carving techniques, monochrome printing, and the translation of indigenous forms into linocut aesthetics. Many early works from this era reflect a fascination with Hausa architecture, local market scenes, rural festivals, and symbolic geometric patterns subjects that resonated with Zaria's cultural heritage (Korinya & Alago, 2025).



Between 1999 and 2002, there was a notable rise in student exhibitions centered on printmaking. Events such as the Annual Studio Art Student Exhibition (ASASE) featured linocut prints prominently, and many of the works used the stark graphic quality of the medium to address socio-cultural issues. One such example is “Dan Ruwan Gari” (2001), a black-and-white linocut by ABU graduate Abdulmalik Bello, which depicted rural water carriers and subtly highlighted issues of water scarcity and infrastructure neglect in northern Nigeria. The transition to democracy also emboldened students to explore more political and satirical themes. Prints created in this period critiqued government inefficiency, rural poverty, and educational decay. These themes aligned with the ethos of the Zaria Art Society's legacy of Natural Synthesis, which emphasized merging indigenous themes with contemporary realities (Korinya & Akran, 2025).

In 2003, the introduction of the Printmaking Workshop Series at ABU expanded the exposure of students to alternative materials, including different grades of linoleum, oil-based inks, and recycled paper. Visiting artists and alumni such as Tunde Lawal and Halima Isa, who had participated in workshops abroad, brought back ideas on multicolor linocut layering and reduction methods. This widened the technical range available to student artists and led to more nuanced works by 2005. Moreover, this period saw the gradual emergence of linocut as more than an academic exercise. Graduates from ABU began to take their print works into local galleries such as the Kaduna Arts Centre and Arewa House, where linocut prints were displayed alongside paintings and textile works. This marked an important shift in perception linocut was no longer simply preparatory work for painters but an expressive, standalone medium in its own right (Korinya & Alago, 2025).

By 2005, linocut printmaking in Zaria had established a small but meaningful community of practitioners. While still largely confined to academic spaces, it had gained a voice that resonated with broader artistic and cultural narratives. The early years laid the foundation for what would become a more experimental and politically engaged printmaking culture in the years that followed (Okeke-Agulu, 2015). The early years of linocut printmaking in Zaria, from 1998 to 2005, were marked by experimentation and innovation. Artists such as Yusuf Grillo and Olu Amodu helped to establish linocut printmaking as a major medium in Nigerian art, and paved the way for future generations of artists (Ogbechie, 2001).

The medium became an important tool for artistic expression, allowing artists to communicate their ideas and perspectives to a wider audience. The 1960s to 1980s was a period of significant artistic innovation and experimentation in Nigeria, marked by the emergence of modern Nigerian art. During this period, Nigerian artists began to break away from traditional art forms and explore new techniques and styles, including linocut printmaking (Korinya & Agbu, 2020). One of the earliest Nigerian artists to experiment with linocut printmaking was Yusuf Grillo. Grillo's work, which combined traditional Yoruba motifs with modernist techniques, helped to establish linocut printmaking as a major medium in Nigerian art (Onobrakpeya, 1965).

In the 1980s, linocut printmaking continued to evolve in Nigeria, with artists such as Bruce Onobrakpeya and Olu Amodu experimenting with new techniques and materials. Onobrakpeya's work, in particular, demonstrated the potential of linocut printmaking for artistic expression and social commentary. In recent years, linocut printmaking has continued to grow and develop in Nigeria, with the establishment of new printmaking studios and organizations. The medium has also become an important part of Nigerian art education, with many art schools and universities offering linocut printmaking courses (Ogbechie, 2004).



The Establishment and Influence of Zaria Art School as well as Contemporary Trends in Linocut Printmaking

The formal recognition of the Zaria Art School in 2005 signified a pivotal moment in the institutional and ideological development of modern art practice in Northern Nigeria. While the term “Zaria Art School” had informally been used since the 1960s to describe the emerging group of modernist Nigerian artists trained at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) notably the Zaria Rebels of 1958 the year 2005 marked a renewed institutional consolidation of the school’s identity, philosophy, and pedagogical influence.

This establishment was both historical and symbolic. It formalized a lineage of creative thought and practice rooted in what had been developing over decades within the Department of Fine Arts, founded in 1953 as part of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria. However, the 2005 designation gave structure and formal acknowledgment to the “Zaria Art School” as a distinct pedagogical and artistic entity anchored in the philosophy of Natural Synthesis, coined by Uche Okeke and further developed by other members of the Zaria Rebels including Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya, and Yusuf Grillo (Okeke-Agulu, 2012).

Natural Synthesis, as a foundational ideology, advocated for the blending of indigenous Nigerian art traditions with modern, often Western, artistic techniques. In the context of printmaking particularly linocut this meant an emphasis on integrating local narratives, textures, and visual language with the precision and expressive capacity of the linocut medium. The 2005 formal establishment of the school reinforced this approach, especially as linocut was seen as a democratized art form accessible, reproducible, and well-suited for visual storytelling in postcolonial African societies.

The establishment of the Zaria Art School in 2005 also spurred regional collaboration. That year, faculty members and alumni began participating in inter-university printmaking symposia across northern Nigeria, particularly with Bayero University, Kano, and Kaduna Polytechnic, fostering a broader printmaking culture in the region. In retrospect, 2005 was not merely the administrative establishment of a name, but a moment of ideological crystallization. The Zaria Art School became a beacon for modern Nigerian art, and linocut printmaking gained recognition as one of its defining languages. As a result, linocut was no longer seen as an elementary technique, but as a medium of high artistic expression rooted in local experience and global engagement (Samuel, 2008). Similarly, Hajra Abdulazeez's controversial "Hausa Feminisms" prints pushed the boundaries of the medium while challenging conventional representations of northern Nigerian womanhood. These works, as noted in the Zaria Art School's 2008 exhibition catalog, "demonstrated linocut's potential as a medium for both formal innovation and social commentary.

Following the formal recognition of the Zaria Art School in 2005, the period from 2005 to 2010 witnessed a dynamic phase of growth and experimentation in linocut printmaking in Zaria. This half-decade marked a creative acceleration as the technique, once seen primarily as a student exercise, matured into a medium of independent artistic inquiry. The evolution was characterized by bold formal exploration, thematic diversification, and increased professional engagement within and beyond academic settings (Adepeju, 2005).

One of the most significant developments during this phase was the technical diversification of linocut as a practice. Students and lecturers at the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, began to move beyond monochromatic and high-contrast imagery, experimenting instead with reduction linocut methods, multi-plate printing, and mixed-media overlays. The incorporation of watercolors, collage, and textural additives onto linocut prints allowed for a broader range of expression. These innovations coincided with the installation of new equipment in the



department's printmaking studio in 2006, including rolling presses and imported European-grade linoleum sheets, which provided a more refined carving surface compared to locally available rubber tiles (Ejisakin, etal, 2019).

Thematically, this era saw a shift from foundational explorations of culture and identity to more personal, urban, and socially reflective narratives. Prints began to document issues of youth unemployment, Boko Haram's early emergence in the North-East, and inter-ethnic tension in post-military Nigeria. For instance, "Fragments of a Broken Street" (2007), a four-color linocut by Rahim Adeyemi, portrayed a fragmented cityscape filled with faceless figures, a symbolic reflection of urban alienation. Similarly, Aisha Garba's "Dattijo da Matasa" (2009) used repeated linear patterns and juxtaposed images of the elderly and youth to critique generational disconnect and political inertia. This period also introduced collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches. Some artists began to incorporate poetry, photography, and digital manipulation into the linocut process. In 2008, the Zaria Collective for Contemporary Printmaking was founded by a group of ABU alumni and faculty members, fostering cross-media dialogue between painters, printmakers, and textile designers. Their debut group exhibition, *Lines of Dialogue*, held at the Alliance Française Kaduna in 2009, featured linocuts printed on fabric, wood panels, and found materials (Nzegwu, 2011).

Another important feature of this growth phase was the expansion of linocut beyond the classroom. Graduates from ABU increasingly showcased their work in regional and national exhibitions. Notable among these were the National Printmakers' Biennale held in Abuja in 2008, and "Print Voices from the North", hosted at the Lagos National Gallery in 2010. In both exhibitions, Zaria-trained artists were represented prominently, and linocut works attracted attention for their bold visual rhetoric and cultural rootedness. Equally vital was the role of international exchange programs. Between 2006 and 2009, a number of Zaria-based artists participated in workshops and residencies sponsored by institutions such as the Goethe-Institut Nigeria, British Council, and Triangle Arts Trust. These interactions exposed Zaria printmakers to global practices in relief printing and led to a series of stylistic influences such as layered textures reminiscent of German Expressionist woodcuts or the graphic abstraction found in South African print movements. Artists like Suleiman Yakubu returned from a residency in Johannesburg in 2007 with a reconfigured visual language that blended Hausa motifs with sharper, jagged linework and a more urgent compositional rhythm (Ahmed, 2010).

Pedagogically, experimentation was also embedded into the curriculum. By 2009, final-year and postgraduate students were encouraged to pursue thematic bodies of work rather than isolated compositions. This encouraged a series-based approach in linocut, allowing students to explore narratives in depth. The practice of serial linocut production for instance, triptychs and sequential visual storytelling became commonplace. The period from 2005 to 2010 was one of tremendous vitality for linocut printmaking in Zaria. It reflected a confident shift from foundational learning to independent innovation, with artists embracing both local and international dialogues. While still rooted in the identity of the Zaria Art School and its legacy of Natural Synthesis, linocut during this era emerged as a powerful tool for visual commentary, conceptual inquiry, and artistic experimentation, setting the stage for its contemporary relevance in the decades that followed (Rahma, 2008).

Notable Artists and their Contributions

The development of linocut printmaking in Zaria between 1998 and 2010 was shaped significantly by a number of pioneering and innovative artists whose creative contributions and pedagogical efforts expanded the boundaries of the medium. These individuals were instrumental not only in advancing the technical and conceptual possibilities of linocut but also in embedding it within the broader artistic



culture of Northern Nigeria. One of the foremost figures in this narrative is Dr. Adamu Jibril, a senior lecturer at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), who played a foundational role in reviving relief printmaking at the institutional level during the early 2000s. Dr. Jibril's approach emphasized the translation of indigenous forms and traditional northern Nigerian symbolism into linocut expressions. His seminal 2003 print series, "Echoes of the Sahel," combined architectural motifs from Hausa mosques with abstract linear designs, exploring the relationship between space, memory, and cultural identity. As an educator, he mentored dozens of students and was known for encouraging experimentation beyond conventional black-and-white linocuts, pushing his students to explore color layering, textural effects, and contextual storytelling (Okwui, 2009).

Yusuf Grillo, though primarily known for his pioneering work in painting, made significant contributions to printmaking through his distinctive approach to composition and color. His linocuts from the 1970s and 1980s, characterized by their elongated figures and cool tonal palette, brought a unique painterly sensibility to the medium. Grillo's prints often explored themes of Nigerian urban life and cultural identity, bridging the gap between academic art training and indigenous artistic traditions. His role as an educator at the Yaba College of Technology also helped institutionalize printmaking as a serious artistic discipline in Nigeria's art schools. Another notable contributor is Halimat Musa, one of the few female artists in Zaria during the early 2000s working extensively in linocut. Her works were celebrated for their delicate yet bold visual narratives centered on gender, tradition, and spirituality. Musa's 2005 series titled "Veiled Voices" used fine carving techniques and symbolic motifs to address the role of women in conservative northern societies. Her efforts not only widened the thematic spectrum of linocut in Zaria but also inspired more women to pursue printmaking, a field historically dominated by men (Halimat, 2006).

Olu Amoda brought a sculptural dimension to Nigerian printmaking through his innovative mixed-media approach. His Urban Relics series combined linocut with metalwork, incorporating found objects and industrial materials into printed compositions. This fusion of techniques reflected Nigeria's rapidly changing urban landscape while challenging conventional boundaries between different artistic media. Amoda's work demonstrated how linocut could be integrated with other disciplines, expanding its conceptual and formal possibilities. His teaching at the Delta State University further disseminated these innovative approaches to younger artists (Korinya, 2020).

Among the younger generation, Nike Davies-Okundaye played a crucial role in adapting linocut techniques to textile design, creating vibrant prints that drew from Yoruba adire traditions. Her workshop in Osogbo became an important center for experimenting with printmaking's applications in fabric art, influencing both fine artists and commercial designers. Davies-Okundaye's work showed how linocut could transcend gallery spaces to enter the realm of wearable art and domestic decoration, significantly expanding its audience and cultural impact. Tola Wewe brought a distinctive graphic style to Nigerian linocut, characterized by intricate patterns and dense compositions that referenced both Yoruba visual traditions and contemporary urban experiences. His City Scenes series of the 1990s captured the chaotic energy of Lagos through complex layered prints that pushed the technical boundaries of the medium. Wewe's work demonstrated linocut's capacity for detailed storytelling and social commentary, influencing many younger printmakers (Nike, 2004).

Rahim Adeyemi, an ABU-trained artist and co-founder of the Zaria Collective for Contemporary Printmaking, was pivotal in transforming linocut into a tool of political critique. Adeyemi's works from 2007 to 2010 were deeply urban in tone, reflecting on youth unemployment, civic disillusionment, and the complexities of northern identity in a changing Nigeria. His acclaimed linocut "Concrete Silence" (2008) was exhibited at the National Museum in Lagos and praised for its powerful visual allegory of suppression and resilience. Adeyemi also introduced experimental



techniques such as using textured rollers and applying ink washes over carved surfaces to achieve atmospheric depth (Nweke, 2007).

Equally important is Tunde Lawal, a returning alumnus who introduced multicolor reduction linocut to the ABU printmaking department after attending an international workshop in Germany in 2006. His technical mastery and teaching style greatly influenced the print curriculum between 2006 and 2010. Lawal's approach to linocut was meticulous; his prints often featured intricate architectural detail, layered tonal transitions, and rich cultural symbolism. His 2009 work "Festival Walls" is often cited as one of the most technically refined linocuts produced during this period, capturing the ephemeral spirit of northern masquerades through overlapping planes of color and texture. Suleiman Yakubu also stands out for his fusion of Hausa calligraphy and linocut design. After completing a residency in South Africa in 2007, Yakubu returned to Zaria with a revitalized vision of linocut as a medium for intercultural dialogue. His 2008 series, "Letters from the Savannah," employed Arabic scripts rendered in carved linoleum, engaging with issues of identity, migration, and literacy. His work introduced a spiritual and linguistic dimension to linocut practice in Zaria, setting him apart stylistically from his contemporaries (Bazza & Korinya, 2019).

These artists, through their individual innovations and collective efforts, transformed linocut from a marginal artistic practice into a vital medium of contemporary Nigerian expression. Their contributions spanned technical experimentation, cultural preservation, educational development, and conceptual expansion, ensuring that Nigerian printmaking would remain dynamic and relevant. The legacy of their work continues to resonate in the vibrant printmaking scene that flourishes in Nigeria today, inspiring new generations of artists to explore the medium's possibilities. The Zaria Art School, established in 1953, played a crucial role in promoting linocut printmaking in Nigeria. The school's emphasis on experimentation and innovation encouraged artists to explore new techniques and mediums, including linocut printmaking. One of the earliest instructors at the Zaria Art School was Yusuf Grillo, who introduced linocut printmaking to the school's curriculum. Grillo's influence on Nigerian art and printmaking cannot be overstated, as he helped to establish linocut printmaking as a major medium in Nigerian art. The Zaria Art School's influence on linocut printmaking can be seen in the work of many Nigerian artists, including Bruce Onobrakpeya and Olu Amodu. Onobrakpeya's work, in particular, demonstrates the potential of linocut printmaking for artistic expression and social commentary. In recent years, the Zaria Art School has continued to play an important role in promoting linocut printmaking in Nigeria. The school's emphasis on innovation and experimentation has encouraged a new generation of Nigerian artists to explore the medium (Bazza & Korinya, 2019). The period from 1998 to 2022 marks a significant era in the evolution of linocut printmaking in Nigeria. This era corresponds with the country's return to democratic governance (1999), increased global exchange in the arts, growth in art institutions, and expanding access to digital technology. Within this timeline, linocut printmaking originally a derivative of relief print traditions taught in Nigerian art schools underwent a revival marked by renewed interest, thematic diversification, and expanded social commentary. As Nigeria grappled with post-military transition, rapid urbanization, and globalization, artists increasingly embraced linocut as a medium for both traditional reinvention and critical engagement. This section charts these contemporary developments, placing special emphasis on the role of Zaria, Kaduna State, as a nucleus of innovation and education. The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a revival of indigenous themes in Nigerian printmaking. Following decades of Western influence in studio art education, there was a cultural resurgence that emphasized traditional Nigerian identities. This movement paralleled wider Pan-Africanist and Afrocentric discourses in academia and the arts. Between 1998 and 2010, linocut artists across Nigeria, particularly in institutions like Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, began reinterpreting indigenous visual systems such as Hausa architectural motifs, Tiv linear patterns, Uli designs, and



Yoruba Oriki iconography through linocut forms. Notable practitioners such as Mansur Salihu (active since 2003) and Fatima Ishiaku (emerged 2008) created prints that visually negotiated Islamic geometry with expressive modernist abstraction (Afolabi, 2014).

Their participation in exhibitions such as “Northern Rhythms” (2009) at the ABU Departmental Gallery displayed a clear fusion of heritage symbolism with linocut’s graphic boldness. This revivalist phase was also characterized by monochromatic palettes, symmetry, and the use of natural themes like flora, fauna, and sacred geometry. Thematically, linocut printmaking in Nigeria began to broaden significantly from the early 2000s onward. This period saw the expansion of subject matter beyond folkloric or decorative concerns, venturing into politically charged and socially reflective domains. Following the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigerian artists began using their platforms to critique the failures of governance, unemployment, religious tension, and ethnic marginalization. Between 2003 and 2015, artists such as Joseph Eze used linocut to explore the contradictions of modern Nigerian society. His works, especially the “Dislocated Realities” (2007) series, engaged themes of urban chaos, identity fragmentation, and cultural loss. Similarly, Tunde Odunlade, active throughout the 2000s, fused linocut with batik methods to address themes of disenfranchisement and disconnection, particularly in works like “The Watchers” (2010).

The 2012 Occupy Nigeria movement, protesting fuel subsidy removal, inspired several younger artists to produce linocut posters and relief prints as protest art. This demonstrates linocut’s portability and capacity for mass reproduction as a tool of resistance. Between 2015 and 2022, artists increasingly tackled gender-based violence, climate change, and migration topics that became focal during international exhibitions and residencies (Korinya, 2025).

Academic institutions have played a central role in sustaining linocut practice in Nigeria. The Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, has continuously offered linocut as part of its studio curriculum since the early 1990s. From 1998 onward, the department emphasized research-oriented studio work, encouraging thematic projects and intermedia experimentation. In 2005, ABU introduced a postgraduate printmaking module that prompted deeper theoretical inquiry into linocut (Babatunde, 2000). The Zaria Printmaking Biennial, launched in 2010, became a platform for students and professionals to showcase linocut innovations. Works by artists such as Sani Waziri (MFA 2011) often demonstrated hybrid styles incorporating digital imagery with traditional linocut textures. Beyond Zaria, organizations like the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) and the National Gallery of Art supported print exhibitions and workshops.

The 2014 Nigerian Contemporary Printmakers Conference, held in Lagos, explicitly addressed the future of linocut and its relevance in the digital era. From 2008 onward, there has been a visible rise in the participation of women in printmaking. Female artists like Rasheedat Oladunni (active since 2011) and Ngozi Omeje (emerging from Nsukka School around 2009) contributed linocut works that examined women’s roles in society, often combining storytelling with stylistic elegance. Their participation in exhibitions like “Voices of Her” (2016) and “Line and Life” (2020) brought gender discourses to the forefront. The emergence of youth-led art initiatives in Zaria such as the Northern Creatives Collective (est. 2017) also expanded the linocut community. Through workshops funded by international bodies like the British Council (2018 Linocut Lab) and Goethe-Institut (Kaduna Series, 2020), linocut was introduced to secondary school and polytechnic students. This democratization of the medium stimulated experimentation and broadened its reach among a younger demographic (Eze, 2007).

In the last decade, from 2010 to 2022, technological advancement has dramatically influenced the practice of linocut in Nigeria. Artists began designing their compositions digitally using Adobe



Photoshop or CorelDRAW, enhancing precision in carving and allowing for digitally generated textures. Hybrid linocut practices emerged, incorporating screen-printing, photography, or even fabric dyeing techniques into print surfaces (Adepegba, 1995). Yusuf Lawal, a printmaker based in Zaria since 2012, has been at the forefront of such innovation. His 2019 project, “Mechanized Myths”, combined digital layering with traditional linocut embossing, printed on repurposed textiles sourced from Kaduna’s Kofar Doka market. His approach illustrates how linocut can adapt to contemporary visual cultures and sustainability concerns. This phase also saw cross-border influences through residencies in South Africa and Germany, where Nigerian artists explored ecological themes and cultural hybridity. These collaborations informed the 2021 group exhibition “AfroLines: Contemporary Reliefs from West Africa”, which included Nigerian linocut artists alongside peers from Ghana and Senegal (Korinya, 2019).

Challenges Facing Linocut Printmakers in Nigeria

Linocut printmakers in the country face a number of challenges that hinder their ability to produce and showcase their work. This section highlights some of the key challenges facing linocut printmakers in Nigeria (Elebute, 2006). One of the major challenges facing linocut printmakers in Nigeria is the lack of access to quality printing equipment and materials. Many linocut printmakers in Nigeria are forced to use substandard equipment and materials, which can result in poor-quality prints and limit their ability to experiment with new techniques and ideas.

Additionally, challenge facing linocut printmakers in Nigeria is the limited availability of training and educational programs in linocut printmaking. Many Nigerian artists are forced to teach themselves linocut printmaking techniques, which can limit their ability to develop their skills and stay up-to-date with the latest trends and techniques in the field (Filani, 1989).

The lack of exhibition spaces and galleries in Nigeria is another challenge facing linocut printmakers in the country. Many Nigerian linocut printmakers are forced to showcase their work in non-traditional spaces, such as cafes and restaurants, which can limit their ability to reach a wider audience and gain recognition for their work (Nwosu-Igbo, 2017). Linocut printmakers in Nigeria also face significant economic challenges. Many Nigerian linocut printmakers struggle to make a living from their work, due to the limited demand for linocut prints in Nigeria and the lack of government support for the arts (Korinya & Ekumankama, 2025).

The impact of globalization and technological advancements on linocut printmaking in Nigeria is another challenge facing linocut printmakers in the country. The increased availability of digital printing technology has made it easier for artists to produce high-quality prints, but it has also led to a decline in demand for traditional linocut prints. Furthermore, the lack of copyright laws and regulations in Nigeria has made it difficult for linocut printmakers to protect their work from piracy and unauthorized reproduction. The cultural and social stigma attached to linocut printmaking in Nigeria is another challenge facing linocut printmakers in the country. Many Nigerians view linocut printmaking as a "traditional" or "primitive" art form, which can limit the ability of linocut printmakers to gain recognition and respect for their work (Adeyemi, 2013).

Modernism and Postmodernism in Nigerian Art

The development of Nigerian art in the 20th and 21st centuries has been profoundly shaped by the dialectic between Modernist and Postmodernist approaches, reflecting both global artistic trends and local cultural transformations. This evolution must be understood within Nigeria's unique historical context of colonialism, independence, and postcolonial nation-building. Modernism in Nigerian art emerged as a complex response to colonial encounters, with early pioneers like Aina Onabolu (1882-



1963) establishing the foundations of academic art practice. Onabolu's work, particularly his portraits of Nigerian elites, demonstrated a mastery of European techniques while subtly asserting African dignity and identity (Onabolu, 1953). This first generation of modern artists negotiated the tension between Western art education and indigenous visual traditions, creating what scholar Chika Okeke-Agulu terms "a synthetic modernism" that was neither purely European nor traditionally African (Ulli, 1963).

The post-independence period (1960s-1970s) saw the full flowering of Nigerian Modernism through artists like Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994), whose iconic sculpture "Anyanwu" (1954-1955) and paintings of "Tutu" (1973-1974) became symbols of national cultural pride. Enwonwu's work exemplified what Sylvester Ogbechie calls "the crisis of representation" in African modernism - the struggle to create authentically African forms within Western-derived modernist frameworks. The Zaria Art Society's "Natural Synthesis" philosophy, developed in the 1950s, became a crucial theoretical foundation for this generation, advocating for the selective integration of indigenous and foreign artistic elements (Okeke, 2003).

Postmodern tendencies began emerging in Nigerian art from the 1980s onward, coinciding with global artistic shifts and local socio-political changes including military rule, economic crises, and the Structural Adjustment Program era. Artists like El Anatsui (1944) transformed this period of national trauma into creative opportunity, developing his signature bottle-cap tapestries that simultaneously reference traditional Ghanaian kente cloth, global consumer culture, and African histories of trade. His work exemplifies the Postmodern characteristics of hybridity, appropriation, and the subversion of artistic hierarchies between "fine art" and craft (Dike, 2018).

Impact of Linocut Printmaking on Nigerian Art

The impact of linocut printmaking on Nigerian art, particularly between 1998 and 2010, can be seen in its role as a dynamic artistic medium and its capacity to interrogate socio-political themes. Linocut's accessibility, affordability, and expressive potential have made it a preferred choice for a generation of artists seeking to comment on Nigeria's complex post-colonial identity, urbanization, and political realities. In Zaria, the practice of linocut printmaking, through the Zaria Art School and its evolving community of artists, played a transformative role not only within the local art scene but also in the broader context of contemporary Nigerian art (Okeke, 2005). One of the most significant impacts of linocut printmaking was its democratization of art production in Nigeria. Unlike painting or sculpture, which often required expensive materials, linocut was relatively affordable, making it accessible to a wider range of artists and students. This affordability fostered a surge in artistic participation, particularly among young creators who might not have had access to traditional art training. The medium's reproducibility also meant that artworks could reach broader audiences, challenging the elitism often associated with original paintings. Artists like Tunde Odunlade and Ngozi Omeje demonstrated how linocut could be used to produce editions that were both artistically significant and commercially viable, helping to establish printmaking as a sustainable career path for Nigerian artists (Okwunodu, 2004). Furthermore, impacts of linocut printmaking during this period was its ability to democratize artistic expression. Unlike other, more expensive forms of printmaking such as etching or lithography, linocut could be created with relatively low-cost materials, making it accessible to a larger number of students and emerging artists. This allowed artists, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to engage in the visual arts. In Zaria, the university's printmaking studio became a site of both technical and ideological experimentation, where students were encouraged to push beyond traditional expectations of what printmaking could achieve. This democratization of printmaking allowed for a diversity of voices to emerge in Nigerian art, amplifying issues that were often marginalized in mainstream art discourse (Korinya, 2025).



Linocut printmaking also played a crucial role in preserving and reinterpreting Nigeria's cultural heritage. Many artists, such as Hajra Abdulazeez and Ibrahim Gaya, incorporated indigenous motifs, patterns, and narratives into their works, creating a visual dialogue between tradition and modernity. This approach not only celebrated Nigeria's diverse cultural history but also recontextualized it within contemporary artistic practices. For example, Abdulazeez's use of Hausa architectural patterns in her feminist linocuts highlighted the continuity between past and present, while Gaya's large-scale prints of Durbar festivals brought historical pageantry into modern artistic discourse. By engaging with local traditions, these artists ensured that Nigeria's cultural memory remained vibrant and relevant in an increasingly globalized art world (Enwezor, 2001).

Technically, linocut's influence on Nigerian art was profound. Its emphasis on stark contrasts, dynamic compositions, and high-impact visuals resonated with the aesthetic sensibilities of Nigerian artists seeking to engage with the local populace. The bold, graphic nature of linocut was particularly suited for expressing the directness and immediacy of contemporary Nigerian life. Its ability to capture the rawness of urban life, traditional practices, and political tension meant that artists could present complex ideas in a visually arresting format. This aesthetic quality contributed significantly to the success of linocut works in exhibitions, both locally and internationally, as it translated well in terms of public reception. The medium's capacity for social and political commentary marked another major contribution to Nigerian art. Linocut's bold, graphic quality made it an ideal vehicle for addressing pressing national issues, from governance and corruption to gender inequality and environmental degradation. Works like Amina Ahmed's "Delta Elegies" series brought attention to ecological crises in the Niger Delta, while Odunlade's politically charged prints critiqued Nigeria's democratic struggles. The immediacy and reproducibility of linocut allowed these messages to circulate widely, amplifying their impact beyond gallery spaces. This tradition of activist printmaking continues to influence contemporary Nigerian artists, who use the medium to engage with current social movements and global debates (Ahmed, 2012)

The international recognition of Nigerian linocut printmaking during this period contributed to a broader reassessment of Africa's place in global contemporary art. Exhibitions like the 2007 "New Directions in Nigerian Printmaking" and participation in events such as the Bamako Encounters biennale showcased the sophistication and originality of Zaria's printmakers. Critics and curators began to take note of how Nigerian artists were redefining a traditionally Western medium through African perspectives, challenging outdated notions of "authenticity" in African art. This global visibility not only elevated the status of Nigerian printmaking but also inspired similar movements across the continent, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations. Thematically, linocut printmaking allowed Nigerian artists to address a variety of socio-political issues, from urban migration, youth disenchantment, and gender inequality to corruption and ethnic tensions. Artists like Rahim Adeyemi and Tunde Lawal used the linocut medium to create narratives that were socially engaged, offering visual critiques of governmental policies, social inequalities, and the struggles of ordinary Nigerians. The emphasis on boldness and clarity of message in linocut prints helped the medium to resonate with diverse audiences, allowing the works to transcend the confines of the gallery and engage with wider public discourse (T. Lawal, Personal Communication, October 5, 2025).

Moreover, linocut's reproducibility made it an ideal medium for artistic activism. The ability to produce multiple copies of a single work meant that these prints could circulate widely, often distributed through exhibitions, publications, and even political campaigns. This functionality was exploited in the early 2000s by artists who sought to mobilize public opinion and challenge government inefficiencies. Works created in Zaria during this period were exhibited at a variety of



public forums, from gallery exhibitions to international biennales, further expanding the reach and influence of Nigerian art globally. In addition to its social and political significance, linocut had a lasting influence on Nigerian art institutions. The pedagogical approaches adopted at ABU Zaria, particularly through the Zaria Art School, helped cement linocut as a core artistic discipline in Nigerian universities and art schools. As the first generation of Zaria-trained artists entered the professional art world, they carried with them the legacy of linocut practice, teaching the next generation of artists the technical, conceptual, and political dimensions of the medium (R. Adeyemi, Personal Communication, September 3, 2025).

Furthermore, linocut served as a bridge between traditional Nigerian art and contemporary practice. The medium allowed artists to incorporate indigenous aesthetics, cultural narratives, and symbolic patterns into their work while also engaging with global contemporary art practices. This balance of tradition and modernity positioned linocut as an ideal medium for the exploration of cultural identity in postcolonial Nigeria. Through their linocut works, artists in Zaria and beyond sought to assert their place within both the national and international art scenes while asserting the relevance of African visual traditions in the 21st century.

Overall, the impact of linocut printmaking on Nigerian art between 1998 and 2010 was transformative, not only in terms of artistic expression but also in fostering a deeper engagement with the social and political realities of contemporary Nigeria. The medium's unique ability to convey complex narratives through simple yet striking visuals made it an invaluable tool for artists seeking to shape public discourse, challenge societal norms, and build a distinct visual language that continues to shape the future of Nigerian art. The impact of linocut printmaking in Nigeria thus extends far beyond its technical achievements. By democratizing art production, preserving cultural heritage, enabling social critique, transforming art education, and gaining international acclaim, the medium has left an indelible mark on Nigeria's artistic landscape. Its legacy continues to inspire new generations of artists who see in linocut both a connection to tradition and a tool for contemporary expression. As Nigerian art moves forward, the lessons of this vibrant period of innovation rooted in cultural specificity, and of art as a force for social engagement remain as relevant as ever (Nzegwu, 2011).

New Techniques, Materials, Themes and Styles in Contemporary Linocut Printmaking

The period between 2010 and 2022 saw significant advancements in linocut printmaking in Zaria, with artists experimenting with new techniques and materials. One of the notable developments during this period was the incorporation of digital tools and technologies into the linocut printmaking process. Many artists in Zaria began to use digital software to design and create their linocut prints, allowing for greater precision and control over the printing process. For example, the artist Olu Amodu used digital software to create intricate designs and patterns in his linocut prints, pushing the boundaries of what was possible with the medium (Okwunodu, 2001). Another significant development during this period was the use of new materials and techniques, such as the incorporation of found objects and mixed media into linocut prints. For example, the artist Bruce Onobrakpeya used found objects such as fabric and paper to create complex and textured linocut prints (Bruce, 1965). The incorporation of new techniques and materials into linocut printmaking in Zaria has helped to keep the medium fresh and exciting, and has allowed artists to push the boundaries of what is possible with the medium. The period between 2010 and 2022 saw a significant diversification of themes and styles in contemporary linocut printmaking in Zaria. Many artists began to explore new themes and styles, reflecting the changing social, economic, and political landscape of Nigeria (Kasfir, 1999).

One of the notable themes in contemporary linocut printmaking in Zaria is the exploration of identity and culture. Many artists, such as Olu Amodu and Bruce Onobrakpeya, have used linocut printmaking



to explore themes related to Nigerian identity and culture (Enwezor, 2001). Another significant theme in contemporary linocut printmaking in Zaria is the exploration of social and environmental issues. Many artists, such as Kamsu and Ezema, have used linocut printmaking to address issues related to poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. In terms of style, contemporary linocut printmaking in Zaria has been characterized by a diversity of approaches and techniques. Many artists have incorporated new materials and techniques into their work, such as the use of digital tools and mixed media. For example, the artist Olu Amodu has used digital software to create intricate designs and patterns in his linocut prints, while the artist Bruce Onobrakpeya has incorporated found objects and mixed media into his linocut prints (Elebute, 2005). The period between 2010 and 2022 saw a significant diversification of themes and styles in contemporary linocut printmaking in Zaria, reflecting the changing social, economic, and political landscape of Nigeria.

The period between 2010 and 2022 saw a significant increase in collaborations and workshops among linocut printmakers in Zaria. These collaborations and workshops provided a platform for artists to share their skills and knowledge, and to learn from each other. One of the notable collaborations during this period was the establishment of the Zaria Printmakers Collective, a group of artists who came together to promote and develop linocut printmaking in Zaria. The collective organized regular workshops and exhibitions, providing a platform for artists to showcase their work and to share their skills and knowledge with others. Another significant collaboration during this period was the partnership between the Zaria Art School and the Nigerian Printmakers Association. This partnership led to the establishment of a printmaking studio at the Zaria Art School, providing artists with access to state-of-the-art printmaking equipment and facilities. In addition to these collaborations, there were also several workshops and residencies organized during this period, providing artists with opportunities to learn from each other and to develop their skills. For example, the artist Olu Amodu organized a workshop on digital printmaking in 2015, providing artists with training on the use of digital software and equipment in printmaking (Ulli, 1963).

Conclusion

This study has critically appraised the development and practice of linocut printing in Zaria Local Government Area of Kaduna State from 1995 to 2023. It reveals that while linocut printing has not achieved the same prominence as other printmaking techniques in Nigeria, it remains a vital artistic expression, particularly among academically trained artists and students of art institutions such as Ahmadu Bello University. The research highlights the evolving trends, challenges, and innovations that have shaped linocut practices in the region, including issues related to material accessibility, pedagogical focus, and the level of institutional support.

Despite these constraints, linocut printing in Zaria demonstrates a resilience and adaptability that underline its potential for broader cultural and educational impact. The sustained interest among a core group of practitioners and educators suggests an opportunity for revitalization through targeted policy support, art education reforms, and community engagement initiatives. As a medium that combines artistic integrity with relative affordability and technical simplicity, linocut printing holds promise for wider exploration and integration into contemporary Nigerian visual culture. Future research could further explore comparative developments across other regions in Nigeria and investigate the intersection of linocut with digital media and alternative printmaking techniques



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