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## NEGLECT OF ARTISTS IN URBAN CITY BEAUTIFICATION: A CASE STUDY OF MINNA METROPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper stresses the need for all Stakeholders in urban planning to have common front where issues of urban beautification can be properly harnessed with a focus to getting the desired City. The paper denounces the neglect of the artist who is uniquely endowed with the flair to generate art works that can add piquancy to our urban city. Experience has shown that artists are not called upon by the city planners and the art works too are created by none professionals. This paper therefore takes a look at some selected work designated at some strategic roundabout in Minna metropolis. Findings indicated that the works were not professionally executed by artists. The paper finally concluded that Minna township roundabouts and four major entrances to the state capital need to be redesigned by the stakeholders with public art works. This will give Minna the Niger state capital national and international recognition in terms of aesthetics, economic development and beautification.*

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**Keywords:** *Artist, metropolis, beautification, urban city, recognition, roundabouts.*

### INTRODUCTION

The beautification of urban centres has been one of the central aspects of development policy of governments in Nigeria. Since the early 1960s, sculpture works have been commissioned by government to adorn public squares at federal capital in then Lagos. The success of this environmental beautification schemes has been tremendous, as it soon spread rapidly to other urban cities. A few of such cities are Benin, Jos, Kaduna, Enugu, Uyo, and Port Harcourt that have been transformed into beautiful cities. (Ochigbo, 2004)

Public art is principally for beautification of the environment as well as historical landmark monuments that are suppose to speak volumes of the environment and culture of the people. Ashen, et al (2002) also believed that Public art in the urban setting exists mainly for the sake of the community, joining utility and beauty and also give historic meaning to the community.

This paper highlights the essence of beautifying the physical environment in urban cities and the need to involve stakeholders (especially the artist) in adding spice to the urban cities. Minna, the capital of Niger State is chosen as a sample area. The choice of Minna stems from the fact that the city has a long history of artistic creativity such as Dr Larli Kwali pottery and Bida brass works to mention but a few. It is also of note that most of the big cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Jos, commissioned public works of arts without inclusion of artists at the planning stage, so it is pertinent to avoid the mistakes of earlier big cities as observed in order to create a proper and harmonious city beautification, with art acting in synergy with other factors. The aim of our discourse is to focus on the artist as stakeholder in the process of urban city beautification and transformation.

The presentation begins with a general description of the physical environment that form the urban city called Minna in which these compositions that are called public art works are situated and a comparison of the various functions they serve in Minna metropolis. The physical relationships (mass, space, rhythm, proportion etc) which these public arts are supposed to be endowed with, would be discussed in line with samples of works chosen within Minna metropolis.

#### **CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ART**

Public art is any work of art or design that is created by an artist specifically for a public space. It can be functional, decorative, and large or small. It can be cast, carved, built, assembled or painted. Whatever its form, public art attract attention, provokes thought, stir emotion, and inspire discussions. It has the power to transform and energize our public places into environments that invite interaction among community members. Public Art can also play an important role in contributing to the vision and meeting the objectives set out in strategic community plan. It can also:

- Encourage a sense of community identity and civic pride.
- Be a mechanism and tool for community capacity building and regeneration.
- Create a high quality visual and cultural environment.
- Contribute to the conservation and development of heritage of a community.

#### **THE IMPORTANCE AND EFFECT OF PUBLIC ART**

Today, public art works are acquiring different characteristics with the effects of globalization and reflection of technological development on the arts. In this context, public art activity is improved in a social perspective rather than as a symbolic phenomenon. For example according to Bunschoten (2002) public art can reaffirm or reveal a sense of place in a symbolic and visually stimulating way by evoking some aspect of socio-cultural, natural, physical, political, economic or historic context by linking events

and history to create a collective memory that can provide useful mental relaxation for the user.

### **MINNA ENVIRONMENTAL PHYSICAL PLANNING**

The Minna physical environment has a lot to offer for artists and stakeholders of urban city planning to explore. The physical environment in Minna has been a thing of concern to all that appreciate beauty in a harmonious whole. Yet we find out that the planning has been left to a few stakeholders like urban development board to the detriment of the artist who should have a say in the actual beautification of the city. Minna metropolis potentially provides opportunities for a diverse range of life-styles and for a richness of activities within it. Ahsen, et al. (2002) also affirms that the environment that is aesthetically of high quality and motivates the people who live there is important. Therefore it is the position of this paper that the planning and beautification of Minna urban city was done without the artist in mind, this has resulted in making the urban development board to be struggling with space, such that the city roundabouts are restructured to create space for visual forms that are not public art works. All the visual forms in Minna are centred on the roundabouts. Public arts works, such as Mural and mosaic are not found at all. Most of the visual forms do not reflect the people's culture but some pretend to do so.

### **ESSENCE OF PUBLIC ART**

Public art cannot be ignored especially now that government is proposing better life for people. This is because public art contributes appreciably to better environments. Modernist aesthetic thinking holds the emotional well being of the percipient of art supreme, which is that other than contemplating the joys to be derived, art is not to be seen as having any other purpose (Egonwa, 1992). Art is timeless, purposeful and relevant to any given environment. This is why the individual artist, the community, and the authorizing agents are relevant in the planning process. In public art, one man cannot decide for the people, and that is why all the stakeholders of the environment have a role to play for the harmonization of the environment. Where this does not exist, the very essence of these public works is defeated. For instance all the visual forms in Minna major roundabouts are not public arts work and they don't represent the people's culture. Improper planning of the environment and lack of involvement of the artists occasioned this sort of problem.

It is the position of this paper that Minna need an urgent commissioning of accredited professional artists (Sculptors and painters) to join the stakeholders in planning and redesigning the roundabout with public art works. These professionals are equipped and versed in the nature of beautification, as such are better placed to consider the suitability of a design and technique in relation to the environment. The visual form executed by non-professionals are bound to meet considerable resistance and criticism not only from the public whose interest this work represents, but even from the city administrators, who have flair for beauty. Ekanem (2000) in describing such visual art forms said, they show a

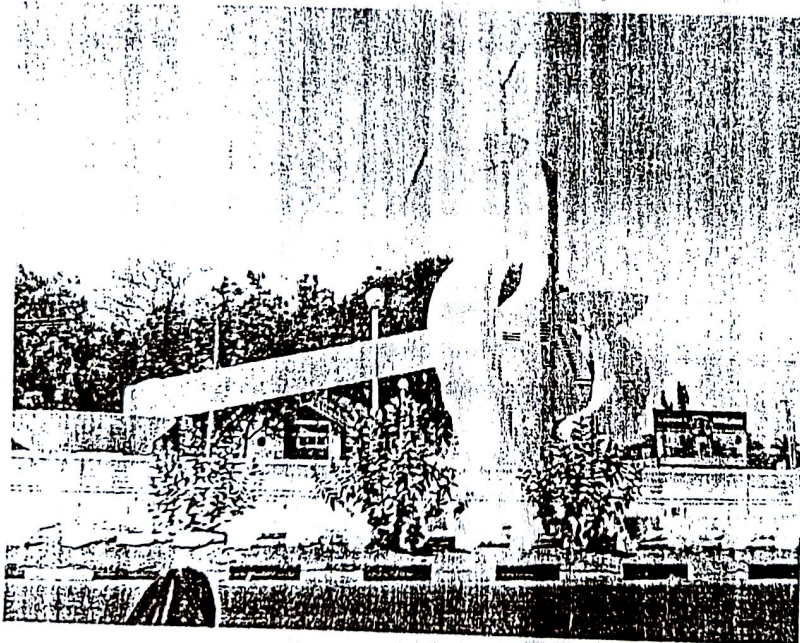
consistent lack of form and content as compared to art works executed by professional artists.

### **SELECTED VISUAL FORMS IN MINNA METROPOLIS**

A few selected visual forms were discussed and examined to find out their relationship to the environment and suitability in the chosen environment. What they contribute and communicate to the environmental beautification. The works selected were chosen based on the purposive sampling design, as each visual form is single and indivisible.

#### **AHMADU BAHAGO ROUNDABOUT:**

The work is assumed to be for aesthetic purpose with smooth linear forms with inscriptions of vertical and horizontal green square forms. The main material used is reinforced concrete finished with white glossy paint.



*Figure 1.0 Ahmadu Bahago Roundabout.*

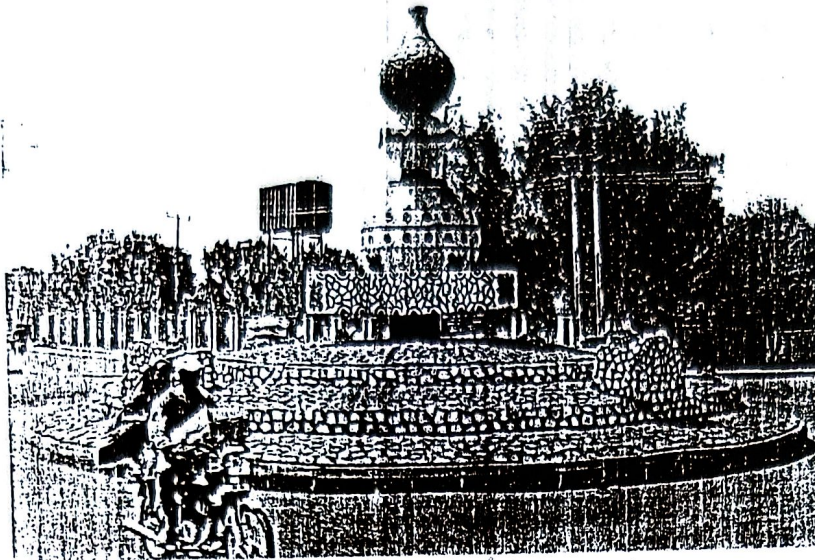
*Source: Author (2010)*

The work as pictured above does not depict any of the cultures in Niger state; but just a representation of four distinct forms arranged and, look like biomorphic structure that has any resemblance with the Gbagyi or Nupe culture. The composition looks like a fountain and it has never functioned. The figures were arranged in a descending order with the tallest in front and the shortest at the rear.

#### **GOVERNMENT HOUSE ROUND ABOUT:**

This composition of traditional pots and dual calabash, with inscribed motifs is assumed to represent the culture of the Gbagyi and Fulani. The form is arranged one on top of the

other forming a vertical composition, with white, black and golden colour. The top most shape looks like a pot and the down shape in white and gold with northern crest resembles the Fulani calabash.



*Figure 2.0 Government House Round about.*

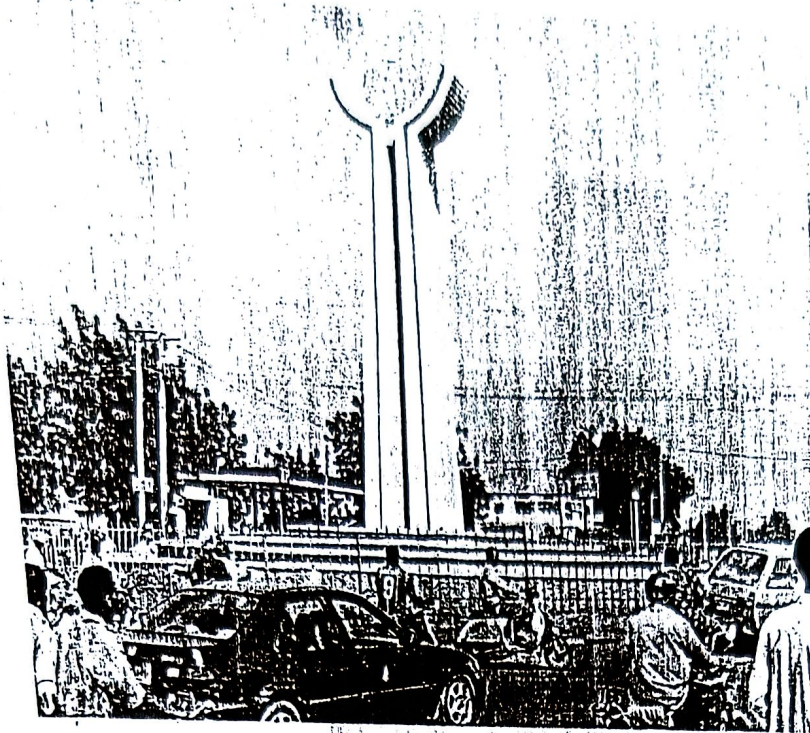
*Source: Author (2010)*

The general motifs on the figure represent the arewa crest and not Nupe or Gbagyi symbol. The materials used are concrete and the general outlook is circular in nature obviously not done by an artist, therefore lack artistic creativity.

#### **CENTRAL MOSQUE ROUNDABOUT:**

This work is not properly placed looking at it from the cultural aspect of this community. It is not related to the culture of any of the Niger state tribe. Also based on the placement, the location is the Minna central mosque area, it would have been better if it is an Islamic calligraphy, or something Islamic in motif.

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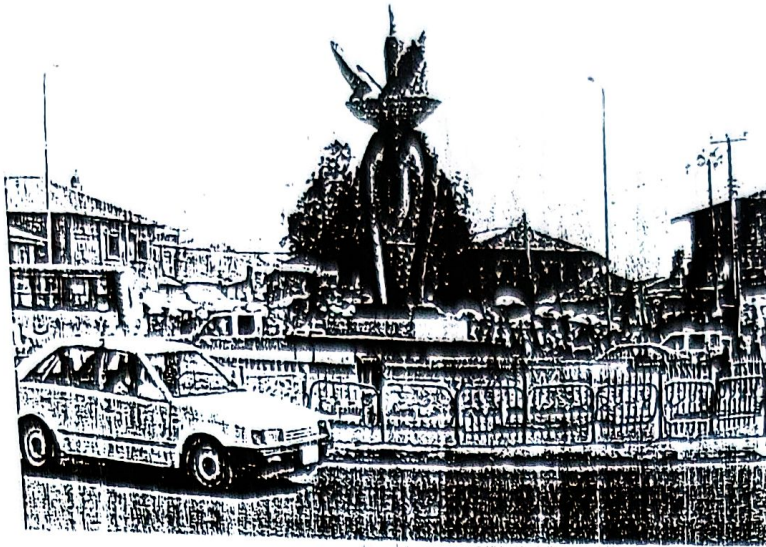


*Figure 3.0 Central Mosque Roundabout Source: Author (2010)*

The figure is a western abstract in an elongated form, with extra-ordinary trunk and an open bow at the top in a circle made of tin rods to form round shape. The figure is more of Engineering construction rather than a sculptural piece. The domineering colour is blue and white to liven some parts. The materials use is reinforced concrete.

**MOBIL ROUNDABOUT (CENTRAL MARKET AREA):**

The work at a glance depicts Agriculture which is the traditional occupation of the people. The composition comprises of two hoes standing in a basket containing farm produce, like maize, yam and probably tuber of cassava. This could be representing the Gbagyi culture.



*Figure 4.0 Mobil Roundabout (central market area) Source: Author (2010)*

The figure shows a composition that is well balanced but the execution lacks the professional touch of a sculptor. The site is one of the most strategic points in Minna metropolis.

**PAIKO ROAD POLICE STATION ROUNDABOUT (CLOSE TO U.K. BELLO ART THEATRE):**

In this composition, you could see the joining together of four column-like pillars with an incised circle towards the top. The work is not in any way related to the culture of Minna people. The colour combination is white and some little of blue. The blue colour has an icon representing the Union Bank Logo. This visual form has been customized and dedicated to Union Bank who are the sponsor of the design and construction. It serves as an advertisement and promotional symbol of the Bank.

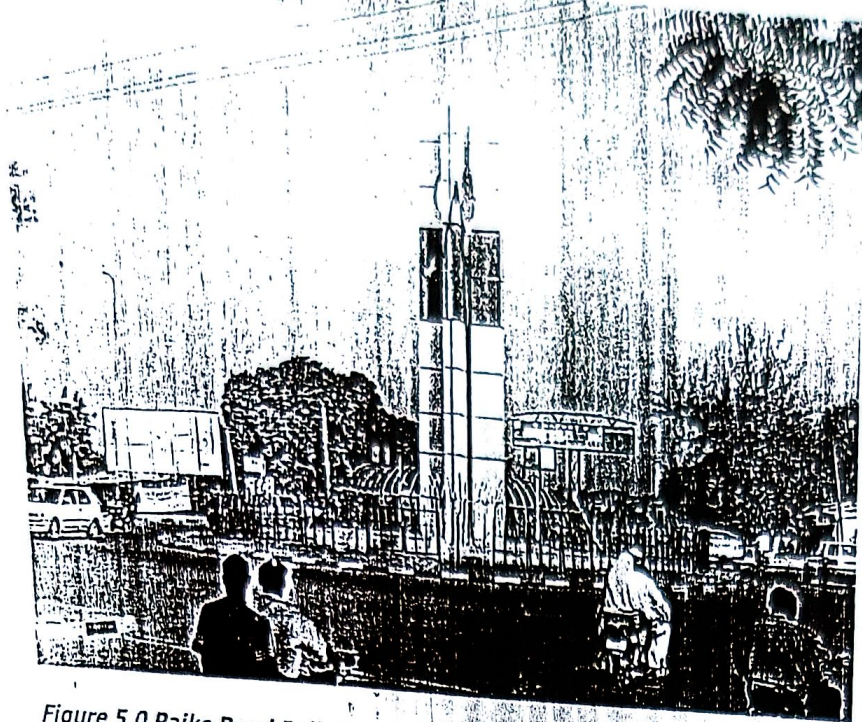
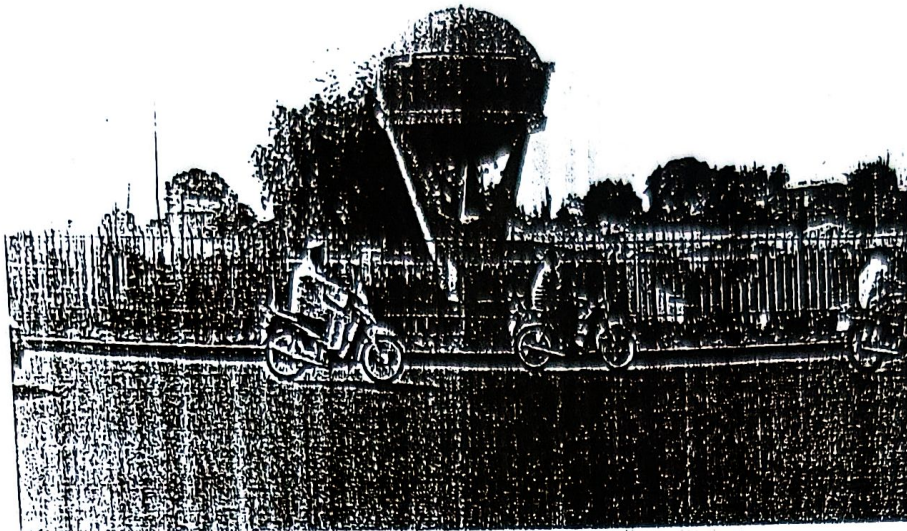


Figure 5.0 Paiko Road Police Station Roundabout. Source: Author (2010)

The entire composition looks like a fountain with landscaping around it for aesthetic purpose. This figure can be interpreted as the "Dako gboya" masquerade in Nupe land. Therefore, it is suggested that the composition should be re-commissioned and be given to a sculptor who will transform it to project and promote tourism potential at the same time serve aesthetic purpose.

**TUNGA ROUNDABOUT BY DAVID MARK ROAD:**

This composition looks like a modified Fulani calabash without any motif, standing on a tripod, with light brown colour and the stand in milk colour. At a glance the object looks like the Fulani milk maid.



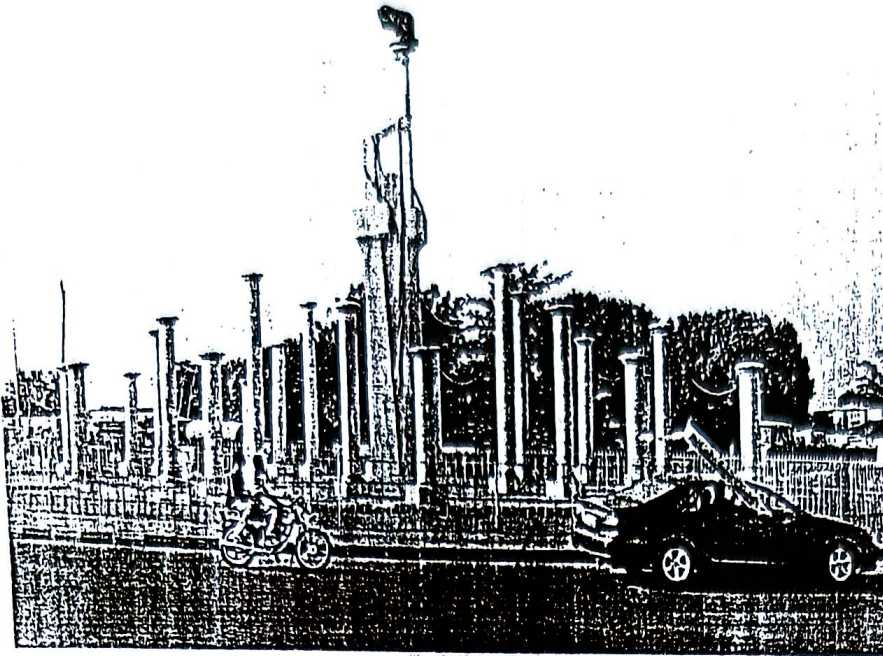
*Figure 6.0 Tunga Roundabout by David Mark road*

*Source: Author (2010)*

Figure 6.0 shows that the material used is reinforced concrete. The object is more of combination of culture and modernization. It would have portrayed Ladi Kwali pottery art work if it was planned and executed by a ceramic artist. The work is assumed to be for aesthetic purpose.

#### **NEW SECRETARIAT ROUNDABOUT BY CITY GATE:**

The work is standing in a wrong place. The theme is like a stylized figure with a sport touch light flame like the Olympic touch of unity. The object is in red colour and the remaining part in white colour.



*Figure 7.0 New Secretariat Roundabout by City gate.*

*Source: Author (2010)*

Figure 7.0 shows that the composition of the roundabout is better erected in a sports complex area or stadium not around secretarial complex, hotels or house of assembly. This figure is suggested that urban planners should move it to a more purposeful area. It is also not related to any of the culture of the people of Niger state.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

After careful examination of these visual forms known as public art works, it was found that they are not properly planned and executed by accredited professional artists to promote environmental aesthetics. In view of this, the present Minna metropolitan aesthetic arrangements call for restructuring.

It is suggested that a new Institutional arrangement based on the principle of "incorporation" should be established such that all stakeholders of the environment and organs recognized in the environmental paradigm can come together to create a meaningful adjustment.

The four major roads that enters Minna the state capitals e.g. from Sarkin Pawa to Minna, Chanchaga to Minna, Bida to Minna, and Zungeru to Minna, should be provided with specific public art works that portray the cultures and traditions of the people for distinct environmental beautification.

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