Art Critique of ……

Picture One(1)

At first glance what hit me about the painting is the stark colors used even as the finish is not smooth and it evokes a sort of coarseness and roughness which coincidentally seems to represent the region it is likely representative of – Muslim Hausaland.

Looking at this piece one can see the depiction of a combination of the warrior represented by the large sword and the horn and then there’s the small slate in between which when we combine it with the books at the right hand side we have value for scholarship. The use of Arabic alphabets is also instructive of Islamic learning.

I like the top part which for me looks like butterflies and/or birds flying in the air. The surface upon which the horn and the sword appear seems like a canvas or carpet spread upon a yellow dotted wall. Yet the shapes cut out at the bottom which look like buildings make it appear like a horizon. Furthermore, the blue on the right reminds me of a waterfall.

There doesn’t seem to be symmetry in the painting as objects seem to be either out-sized or miniature in the context of the whole frame.

One word for this is: Thought-provoking. I will call it The Scholar-Warrior’s Mural.

Picture Two(2)

This one is complicated! I saw the Arewa Motif and then I saw a gun! And I was like…

Anyway, let’s see there’s also a bottle, a smoking pipe, tombstones with RIP, buildings/houses, a bow and arrow, a sword, small red faces with different expressions on them, what looks like trees or mushrooms, and some indeterminate objects that remind me of aliens. And this is quite instructive as it sadly makes me think of how it’s starting to seem as if our dear Arewa is turning into an Alien-land.

The painting looks like it was made upon a rough surface, either a blackboard or a wall. The black background is foreboding when combined with many of the other content. I like the way the artist’s use of straight lines within painting to contrast with other shapes especially the rounded ones. Also the stark colors against the black background grab your attention especially as the painter ensured that white was interspersed all through the frame.

Interesting. I call this: Arewa Alien-land.

Picture Three(3)

Arewa again! We have the distinctive Hausa clothing known as Babbar-Riga with a full embroidery spread out as an overlay to the main background which looks like a cutting from a cloth that has a combination of the cross-section of the earth’s crust and/or a snapshot of galaxies all put into one mix!

This is striking in the sense that it evokes wonder that if you look up and zoom out and capture a large expanse of the galaxy you will get this combination of swirl and streak of colors and yet if you zoom in and compress the earth’s crust it’ll give you something similar starting with the sky blue, then the oceans and then the vegetation and the rocks, the earth and going down to the yellowish-orange boiling lava

Well, back to the Babbar-Riga… by the left it is accompanied with the signature ‘hula’ (Hat) and by the right the leather Bertozzi sandal that seems to depict in the mind an image of a rich ‘Alhaji’. Do I see a classic Benz at the bottom or is it a Chevrolet? Anyway we also have the inimitable and laid to rest Beetle at the crown. The artist decided to use black and white images for the classic cars while he accentuated the more modern items the hat and the shoes to appear in their full color which for me is a way their own way of trying to create a conversation between the classical and the modern!

Lastly before concluding, I found the depiction of stick-people in the piece to be quite off and if I may say, weird. Yet that is the beauty of art whereby it is not for it to make sense to you, but for you to be provoked.

I laughed inwardly when I saw that for the two near the Beetle car, the triangular individual was frowning, meanwhile for the Pentagon couple (who were upside down) near the Benz/Chevy there seemed be something funny/clownish going on! Maybe it’s just me!

All in all, I didn’t really like this one but it still provoked thought and so kudos to the artist!

I call it ‘The Universe of Mai-Babbar-Riga’!

Picture Four(4)

This is my best amongst the four I’ve written on! I love the bright colors that speak to a brightening of the soul. The Sun is my favorite especially how the painter aptly captures the different hues of yellow/golden color that it has and how its glow has turned the horizon into a beautiful and sumptuous orange!

I also love the arrangement of the buildings in a way that depicts community. There’s the large mosque with its crescent near what looks to me like a church with a crucifix atop. Then we have the hotel dropped smack in the middle of it all. This community is also a ‘green’ with vegetation snaking its way all over and trees featuring prominently.

I found it hard to place where this could be and I found myself unable to pin down where it was. In Nigeria, this could be anywhere from Lagos to Sokoto, Makurdi to Yola or Ibadan. And if you even allow me, I’d hazard it’s not even Naija!

The only thing I found missing was the humans milling around as I found it odd that in a picture that had several high rise buildings (up to three (3) storeys), there wasn’t a single window with evidence of a face peeping through! Perhaps that is why the painter decided to give us about five (5) ‘faces’ [scratch that seven (7)] which were depicted by the thatch-roofed huts scattered into the mix of buildings. I giggled as I saw them one second as huts and the next as a bunch of faces! What a way to leave your audience guessing…

I call this: The Sunny Side of Life.

In conclusion I want to say that I really enjoyed writing these nano-reviews and while I’m not even close to an amateur art-critic, I think I have found me a new hobby/pastime and I intend to explore it with a passion. Thanks for the opportunity and I remain:

Haidar Wali