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Special Feature

Professor Best Simon Ochigbo

@60

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editorial statement

This edition of the journal features yet another artistic giant, a Professor of Art in his own right, who merits every iota of honour bestowed upon him. Professor Simon Best Ochiugo who only recently turned sixty years of age has already been celebrated in several quarters via art exhibitions, conferences and a book of readings. For us in the Department of Visual and Creative Arts of the Federal University of Lafia, where he has been an Adjunct Professor for a number of years since the tapping we were, founding on our feet during the formative years all through to 2018 when we gained the NGC full accreditation status, it indeed has been quite a privilege to have been associated with him. A special section highlights his pedigree in painting, art teaching and university administration. We wish Professor Ochiugo fruitful years ahead as he continues to mentor and guide generations behind him.

There are about twenty four academic papers presented here by scholars from several institutions of higher learning almost representative of the whole of what constitutes the Nigerian University system. Their papers treat such issues as the perception of art and education in society, the use of graphic tools for medical diagnosis, the advantages of recycling waste ceramic shards for polishing of surfaces, the aesthetics of drawing, painting and sculpture, the innovative pursuit of and extension of textile products, and several other theoretical postulations that merit the researches undertaken by individuals. The quality of these papers, even though done without any financial support from government or the private sector, shows the great interest scholars have in publishing the results of their research efforts. For us at *Resonance*, it gives us great pleasure to have provided an avenue for this creative harvest.

On a sad note we regret to announce the passing unto eternal glory of Mr. Kango Raymond Kahige, the Assistant Editor, Design and Production of this journal. He died in November 2013 and was buried in December 2013 in his ancestral home in Mbañuku, Vanderkya LGA of Benue State. At the point of his departure he left behind a loving wife, three children and siblings. He was a committed staff of the Department of Visual and Creative Arts, the Faculty of Arts and Federal University of Lafia as a whole. On this journal Raymond was directly in-charge of design and production. When he left us we lost all that he had prepared for the current edition. We are happy to announce to you that his good student Daniel Umaru Hameed, having graduated and served his mandatory one year NYSC scheme took charge of the design and layout of this edition. He has followed in his master's footsteps and we are proud that this tutelage is yielding fruits.

This is basically the reason for the delay in release of this edition. Even as we ask you to bear with us, we urge you to pray for Raymond's peaceful repose. The next edition will be produced in his honour as a way to immortalize his most amiable personality. One of his most recent research papers will be published posthumously alongside a portfolio of his artworks and design accomplishments.

Blaise Gundo Obaden, PhD

Associate Professor

Editor

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UNCONVENTIONALITY IN PAINTING: AN AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF FABRICS IN CREATING CONTEMPORARY PAINTING COMPOSITIONS

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AFEYUAN, Aisha Mervin MA, Prof. Ali/Asu M. SAMI, *Elsawa Gerdas IBRAHIM PhD, Prof. Philip O. GUSHIRE

Abstract

In their quest for stylistic distinctions, as well as, in search for means of venting their ideas on the general dynamics of the human society, artists have consciously and unconsciously moved from the conventional means of creating art, to the use of quite unconventional materials. It is in line with this idea of breaking artistic conventions, that the painterly expression is made, using unconventional materials, specifically, fabric cut-outs. Thus, this paper is concerned with analysing the aesthetic orientations of unconventional exploration. The paper proceeds with a review of other forms of unconventionality, which painters have done in the past, so as to establish a background for such exploration. Four works, which were produced, using fabric cut-outs, were presented in this paper and formal analysis was adopted in analysing the works. The work has juxtaposed both the idea of unconventionality in painting media with the peculiarity of adapting fabric cut-outs as a painting medium, which has been creatively manipulated to these pieces.

Keywords: Unconventionality, Painting, Aesthetic, Analysis, Fabrics, Cut-outs

Introduction

Painting, as one of the major offshoots of art, has evolved over the years. Referring to Renaissance art, Kleiser (2009) opines that "the early stages of artistic training largely focused on imitation and emulation, but to achieve widespread recognition, artists had to develop their own style. Although the artistic community and public at large acknowledged technical skill, the conceptualization of the artwork, its theoretical and formal development, was paramount." In their quest for stylistic distinctions, as well as, in search for means of venting their ideas on the general dynamics of the human society, artists have consciously and unconsciously moved from the conventional means of creating art, to the use of quite unconventional materials.

In this regard, examples of conventional painting media are artists of colour, water colour, pastel, acrylic, gouache, amongst others. However, perhaps in weary of such stereotypical conventions, and in search of more dynamic ways of expressing themselves artistically, artists have taken to the adoption of media and techniques such as collage, as seen in Chris Old's *Holy Virgin Mary*, as well as, in Richard Hamilton's *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*; body art, performance art, installations, mixed media, ephemeral art, amongst several others. Generally, this plunge into the world of the unconventional in art, has created a multiplicity of

expressions.

This shift from the conventional to the unconventional can be traced on the advent of conceptual art in the history of art. According to Kleiser (2009), "the relentless challenges to artistic convention, fundamental to the historical avant-garde, reached a logical conclusion with Conceptual Art in the late 1960s. Conceptual artists asserted that the "artfulness" of art lay in the artist's idea, rather than in its final expression. These artists regarded the idea, or concept, as the defining component of the artwork." It is in line with this idea of breaking artistic conventions, that the painterly expression of the work was done, using unconventional materials, specifically, fabric cut-outs. Thus, this paper is concerned with analysing the aesthetic orientations of her unconventional exploration. The paper proceeds with a review of other forms of unconventionality, which painters have done in the past, so as to establish a background for such exploration. Four works, which are produced, using fabric cut-outs, are presented in this paper and formal analysis was adopted, in analysing the works.

A Review of Diverse Forms of Unconventionality in Painting

For a while now, artists have redesigned and re-presented their environments through different materials, some natural and others, products of man-invented technologies. In so doing, some have even moved from materials and techniques, which are considered conventional, to the use of different (irregular and unconventional) media and techniques and their

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various expressions. It is on these various unconventional ways and means of artistic expressions that this review is based. Thus, four works from four different artists are presented in this feature.



Fig. 1: Jackson Pollock, 1950. 'Jackson Pollock: Blind Spots' at Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas (2015-2016). Courtesy of Gotteveron (2016)

A renowned action painter, Jackson Pollock is amongst the many artists, who have indulged in the use of unconventional materials and/or techniques, in creating their works. Instead of the conventional application of acrylic or oil on canvas for instance, Pollock chose to dip and splash his colours in a creative frenzy in achieving his pieces. Fig. 1, makes a display of Pollock, creating one of such paintings titled 'Blind Spots'. Again, against the convention of painting on stretched surfaces, Pollock is seen painting on an unstretched surface, laid on the wall. Perhaps the artist's works are as a result of the largeness of his works, as well as, the chosen technique, which could be cluttered and untidy if not well handled. Nomis.org (No Date), explains that:

Placing the canvas on the floor, Pollock would dip, splatter, fling, and sweep paint from all sides. But despite the seemingly spontaneous appearance of his paintings, Pollock, like other Abstract Expressionists, maintained a balance of chaos and control. For example, Franz Kline's large black-and-white canvases seem impulsive and full of energy, but he often sketched the compositions out first. Pollock claimed that he maintained control when making his drip paintings.

M'uazu Mohammed (Lari) and Jerry Buhari, both painters from the Zaria Art School, are other artists who have also indulged the splashing technique in positively expressing themselves.

Fig. 2: Textured Memory, Jacob Lari, (2016), 122 x 90cm, Mixed Media on Board. Courtesy of ArtHouse



Contemporary United (2016).

Jacob Lari, and his cornstark creations, is another example of the various unconventionalities, which have been evolved over the years. Titled Textured Memory, the painting in Fig. 2 overstates the cornstark technique, Lari evolved for expressing himself. The technique involves cutting discarded cornstark into tiny beads and capsules; soaking such cornstark beads in various colours, then sticking the coloured cornstark beads on the painting surface, in accordance with the artist's intuition. Buhari (2016) informs that "In 1994, Jacob Lari completed his MFA programme in his Alma Mater, exploring unconventional media using cornstark. This gave him interesting results, which he continued making, most fascinating works that received both national and international recognition."

More specifically Lari (2016) also adds that "Cornstark is a medium I developed and employed for most of my expressions in the 1990s. It became the subject of my Master of Fine Art research from 1990-1994. Prompted by the desire to explore other media, I suspended its use in 1998, after 10 years of work with it." Lari stuck with other means of expressing himself until 2016, when he produced Textured Memory, using the cornstark technique...

Fig. 3





Fig. 4 Yves Klein, *Antropométries de l'époque bleue*, Galerie internationale d'art contemporain, Paris, March 8, 1960. Photograph by Charles Wilt. Art Resource, NY / Klein, Yves (1928-1962) © ARS, NY. Image courtesy of Dominique Lévy Gallery, Sotheby's (2010)

Yves Klein is another artist who adopts an unconventional means in creating his expressions. As seen in Figs. 3 and 4, the artist achieves some of his expressions using the human body as a tool for applying colours on to the painting surface. Here, two nude women are shown, applying colours onto their bodies, thereafter transferring the colours onto the painting surface. The resultant effect of such process is displayed in Fig. 4. The figure carries five similar silhouette imprints of the female anatomy, specifically from the torso, down to the thighs.

Similarly, Muzou Mohammed Sani, during his doctoral research in painting at the Zaria Art School, also created paintings with the foot prints of some dancers. During the *Senge* dance, which is an indigenous dance of the Tiv ethnicity of Benue state, the dancers dipped their feet in paints of different colours, as Sani directed. Then they stepped on and off the prepared painting surface from different angles.

Fig. 5 Just by looking at the work, and the meaning that can be derived from them? Hence, the conceptual framework



for this paper.

Analysis of Works

The works presented for analysis in this paper were

produced as part of Ajeayan's doctoral research into the possibilities of *Configuring the Nyanwawan Masquerade Form into Astring Expressions*. During the research, the artist partially explored several concepts such as the philosophy of truth, the Nyanwawan masquerade's props and costume, as well as, the use of unconventional materials such as niésoji and fabrics. Although, over fifty (50) works were produced during the research, for the purpose of this paper, only four (4) of the works, which were produced under the artist's experimentation with cut-outs fabrics as painting medium, are presented for analysis. Consequently, in analysing their various aesthetic orientations, the works are analysed in line with the concepts of formal analysis.

Fig. 6: *Aember a Mini*: Nuggets of Truth, Fabric Cut-outs, on Canvas, 125 x 122 cm, 2017.



Aember a Mini (Nuggets of Truth) is one of the works created through the unconventional use of fabrics as colours. Produced in 2017, the work creatively manipulates elements such as lines, colours, shape, and form, with principles such as simplicity, contrast, repetition, variety, and dominance, in producing *Aember a Mini*. While cutting out plane-coloured fabrics which range from hues of purple to blue, white and grey, the artist creates a simplistic contemporary painting expression, which has the profile view of the Nyanwawan masquerade's head form, as its central image. The central image is also duplicated with the aid of a thin blue yarn, connecting the presence of a second image, thereby making emphasising the idea that the Nyanwawan masquerade is the dominant image in the composition. Contrast was also used in

masquerade's image in the composition. A repetition of the oval shapes in different sizes and in different colours also creates some sort of variety in the composition. The use of fabric in achieving this piece has helped the artist in achieving the neatness and precision that accompanies the various components of the composition. The work can be referred to as a collage, as the process of achieving the piece involved cutting the various coloured fabrics and pasting them on the already stretched canvas surface.



Fig. 7. Gyeye man Jyo (Eagle and Snake). Fabric Cut-outs on Stretched Fabric. 125 x 122cm. 2017

Titled Gyeye man Jyo (Eagle and Snake), plate II is another rendition, using fabric as an unconventional medium. Unlike in plate I which has the cut-out fabric collaged on a stretched canvas surface, the support for this painting is another non-canvas fabric, thereby adding to the experimental nature of the painting. The silhouettes of an eagle standing on a snake, stand as the central image of the composition. These central figures, which are symbolic in the prep of the Nuerimsem masquerade, are flanked by repeated oval patterns of different sizes and colours. These oval patterns, alongside the central image, creates an almost clustered presentation of the painting. However, the fact that the fabrics used in creating the painting, are plain-coloured, remedied the busy nature of the composition.

Plain cut-out fabrics, carrying hues of blue, purple and white, were used in creating the composition. The edges of the various components of the composition are hemmed with thin yards of yellow, purple and blue colours. Details were also added to the eagle's wings with the help of some dark blue yards, which were cut in

different lengths. The metaphorical strength of the eagle is magnified in the painting, through the use of contrast.



Fig. 8. Drows Kan Kwagh Mom go I (Duality). Fabric cut-offs, on Canvas. 122 x 120cm. 2017.

Conventionally, paintings are mostly done on stretched surfaces. In addition to the unconventional use of fabrics as a painting medium, further creation of the collage was done in this piece (Plate III), on an unstretched canvas surface. Thus, the painting is tied to a horizontal pole, through perforated holes created at the top of the canvas support. Using two major colours - black and a hue of purple - the artist creates a simplistic stylized profile view of two faces facing each other. The two faces, which are conceptualized versions of the mask worn by the Nuerimsem masquerade performer, are separated with a white twin. Balance was achieved through the use of alternate colours in depicting the eyes of the faces. That is, a circular-shaped black fabric was used in representing the eye of the red faced face on the left side of the canvas, and vice-versa.

masquerade's image in the composition. A repetition of the oval shape in different sizes and in different colours also creates some sort of variety in the composition. The use of fabrics in achieving this piece has helped the artist in achieving the neatness and precision that accompanies the various components of the composition. The work can be referred to as a collage, as the process of achieving the piece involved cutting the various coloured fabrics and pasting them on the already stretched canvas surface.



Fig. 7. 'Gyruu man lya' (Eagle and Snake), Fabric Cut-outs on Stretched Fabric, 125 x 122cm, 2017

Titled *Gyruu man lya* (Eagle and Snake), plate II is another rendition, using fabric as an unconventional medium. Unlike in plate I which has the cut-out fabrics collaged on a stretched canvas surface, the support for this painting is another non-canvas fabric, thereby adding to the experimental nature of the painting. The silhouettes of an eagle standing on a snake, stand as the central image of the composition. These central figures, which are symbolic to the prop of the Nyantoso masquerades, are flanked by repeated oval patterns of different sizes and colours. These oval patterns, alongside the central image, creates an almost clustered presentation of the painting. However, the fact that the fabrics used in creating the painting, are plain-coloured, remedied the busy nature of the composition.

Plain cut-out fabrics, carrying hues of blue, purple and white, were used in creating the composition. The edges of the various components of the composition are hemmed with thin yards of yellow, purple and blue colours. Details were also added to the eagle's wings with the help of some dark hued yards, which were cut in

different lengths. The metaphorical strength of the eagle is magnified in the painting, through the use of contrast.



Fig. 8. 'Drova Kaa Kwagh Mm jri' (Duality), Fabric cut-offs, on Canvas, 122 x 120cm, 2017.

Conventionally, paintings are mostly done on stretched surfaces. In addition to the unconventional use of fabrics as a painting medium, further creation of the collage was done in this piece (Plate III), on an unstretched canvas surface. Thus, the painting is tied to a horizontal pole, through perforated holes created at the top of the canvas support. Using two major colours – black and a hue of purple – the artist creates a simplistic, stylized profile view of two faces facing each other. The two faces, which are conceptualized versions of the mask worn by the Nyantoso masquerade performer, are separated with a white void. Balance was achieved through the use of alternate colours in depicting the eyes of the faces. That is, a circular-shaped black fabric was used in representing the eye of the red hued face on the left side of the canvas, and vice-versa.



Fig. 9. Alier, *Cutouts cutoffs on Canvas* 122 x 120cm, 2017

Titled 'Alien', Fig. 9 is a simplistic rendition of the mask which is peculiar in the Nyanwosom masquerade's costume. The title 'Alien' is derived from the distorted and stylized form of the face. With white as the dominant colour in the composition, the painting is horizontally divided into two equal parts, through the introduction of a snake form, which has a symbolic significance in the Tiv culture. According to Tiv mythology, the green snake, which is known as *akwaken* is significant because it laid itself across a river the Tiv encountered during their migration. Here, the green snake is conceptually rendered as red colour.

The horizontal division staggered the positions of the two stylized oval eyes on the face, with each falling on either side of the divided composition. The horizontal division of the composition and the resultant staggered positions of the eyes further enhanced the alien nature of the painting, just as in Fig. 3. *Alien* is also created on an unstretched surface, and suspended the same way as *Duality*.

Conclusion

The gradual or rather sporadic evolution of art can be linked to the emergence and advent of several factors. Amongst such unignorable confronting factors is the idea that humans, especially artists, are constantly in

search of dynamics in nature, relationships, experiences and expressions. Such thirst for the unusual, also owe its origin to the realities of this period, where globalization and modernisation has stimulated the human appetite for creative novelties.

As a response to such creative appetite for the unusual a body of unconventional paintings with fabric cut-outs was created. Some are created on stretched surfaces, while others are collaged on unstretched surfaces. The aesthetic orientations of these creations however, have been seen to be mostly abstracted. The artist's palette is quite restricted and the compositions are generally simplistic. The images, which make up the abstracted compositions, are mainly derived from nature, as they are conceptualised renditions of the human face and some animal forms. The simplified nature of the creations is enhanced by the artist's choice to use plain-coloured fabrics in the compositions.

Interestingly, the popular notion is that the emphasis of art has moved from being on the form and material to the idea that produces the art. That is, the ideas an art work produces are regarded superior to the form or material that conveys such idea. In the creation of these unconventional paintings with fabric cut-outs, this paper concludes that the work has juxtaposed both the idea of unconventionality in painting made with the materiality of adopting fabric cut-outs as a painting medium, which has been creatively manipulated in these pieces.

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