



DEVELOPING PAINTING POSSIBILITIES ON CALABASH AS A SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT: *Creating artworks, especially, painting have undergone a lot of changes overtime. Over the years, artists have adopted different styles and techniques in creating painting using different materials. Most of the inspirations for creating the work are gathered from their immediate environment. This paper discusses how cave walls, rocks, animal skins, animal horns and bones became surfaces on which drawings and paintings were depicted. It also notes how assorted papers, canvases, walls, wood, metal panels and many others have become surfaces used by contemporary artists in creating paintings. In another breath, the paper also takes a look at how calabashes of different shapes and sizes have been used by traditional craftsmen in Nigeria for making a variety of carved and decorative craft works. It discusses how the calabash could be adopted to serve as a support for creating modern paintings. It further explains application of the action based studio methodology in creating over one hundred (100) paintings in acrylic with some analysis*

KEYWORDS: Art, Painting, Support, Calabash, Traditional, Modern, Environment.



INTRODUCTION

Painting has undergone numerous evolutionary changes, modifications and inspiration from the primitive era, through the prehistoric to the contemporary times. The issues of human needs (philosophical, social, psychological, therapeutic, religious, aesthetic, metaphysical, social, biological, magical and cultural) have given cause for artists, especially painters, to play vital roles in sustaining events in times, space and perception (Kum-Essuon 2016, Zhang 2024, Stanczak, e'tal 2024, Pelosi, e'tal 2024 and, Dolledonne, e'tal 2024). Painters are known to use different supports in creating painting in other to derive and express different ideas concerning their survival. A support in painting is the available surface on which a painting or drawing is portrayed depending on the medium that the artist choses. Some of the support commonly used in modern contemporary painting includes assorted papers, canvases, walls, wood, metal panels and many others. Drawings and paintings were depicted on cave walls, rocks, animal skins, animal horns and bones to accomplish the necessities of life through offering of ritualistic and magical rites that were significant to living during the prehistoric period (Nkolika 2022) and, Antropov, e'tal 2024).

The beliefs of ancient Egyptians periods, Greco- Roman civilization, the medieval ages, Persia and many others, whose artistic values have been sources of motivation in the contemporary times have also witnessed some of the most pungent and significant civilizations in the history of art practice. Some major painting support in use over the times includes; papyrus, tomb walls, terracotta vase for storing wine and oil, metals, and non-permanent support like human skin, tree trunks, stones and many others. Some of these items were later thrown away as waste (Kum-Essuon 2016), and Golia e'tal 2024).

These different painting techniques and styles were later adopted at various periods in the European art movements to execute paintings on fresh plastered walls, mosaics, wooden doors, pillars, metal panels, and glass windows mostly in temples and churches carrying biblical stories to aid the teaching and understanding during the Gothic era. In the Renaissance period, artists were privileged to explore their potentials and excel in fields within secular life with different materials and styles. As time passes by, several art movements sprang up namely; Cubism, Dadaism, Rococo, Impressionism, Expressionism and Fauvism. This movements inspired different ways of art creation new ways as it extended other possibilities more than any other period. Consequently this prospect in painting prompts the exploration of using dry shells of calabash as a support in painting.

Adoption of Calabash as a Support in Painting

The dried shell of Calabash has several uses and benefits, for example, calabashes (dried and hollowed out Gourds) are used for typical utensils such as ladles, bowls, cups, bottles and containers to keep liquids, floats, pipes and musical instruments. It can also be used for carrying water, or can be made for carrying items, such as maize, yam, millet, making ornaments, utensils, decoration, craft, food preparation, rituals, and musical instruments etc. The essence of this paper is to highlight the creative functionality of calabash to produce painting compositions by using different sizes and shapes of dried shell of calabash as a support in painting. Calabash is simply the dried hollow shell of a gourd used for household utensils which may be stained with colours by rubbing them with millet leaves; blue, with indigo among others. It can sometime be darkened by hanging in a smoky room.

Though, calabashes can be decorated using different techniques or methods according to the tradition of the area, and they can sometime be used as they are, by regular washing. There are various types of designs and patterns used by carvers to carry out different decorations on calabash. These are achieved by applying different types of techniques or methods namely: Scraping; Carving; scorching; Pyro-engraving and Pressure-engraving. In the most areas of the country, the techniques or methods in use are combined. Oziogu, (2024), Marte, C. (2024) observe that Calabash carvers in Oyo State or Kwara state combine Scraping Carving and Engraving techniques. For example, the Pyro-engraving and the engraving techniques are combined in Adamawa state for calabash decoration, while in Kwara and Sokoto, Scraping, Carving and scarification as well as Painting methods are used.

Some of the tools used for calabash decoration include: Knife of different sizes and shapes; iron needles; Saw; perforated polished can; scrapper; nails; white chalk, gloss paint, and many others.



Calabash (Art and Craft)



Decorated Calabash from the Northern Nigeria



Carved and pigmented Calabash



Carved and pigmented Calabash with white chalk

METHODOLOGY

This study employed studio practice base methodology research method which is based on perceptual encounter by means of visual contact. The studio exercise methodology guides the artist studio work directed towards discovering supports in painting by applying modern medium like artist's oil colour, acrylic, gouache, and mixed media. Mohammed (2014), Wesner (2024), Tailor & Francis (2024), Barrette and Bolt (2024), O'Connor (2024), and Ferguson (2024) observe that practice based research is the composite of qualitative and action research method in studio enquiry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Realistic and abstract paintings are produced on different sizes and shapes of calabashes using acrylic colour, some of the paintings executed are mainly landscapes, figures, and abstract forms through contemplations from derived from Kambari patterns and motifs from Borgu. The paintings were categorized into four stages namely; Plee, Keeree, Gunboo, and Zeere. The different shapes and sizes of the calabash inspired this studio base research in painting. Some shapes are oval, spherical and cylindrical and the philosophy represents the life cycle of humans which indicates the beginning and the terminal is the beginning of another life as people die others are been born to live.

Stage I: Plee (flat calabash)

This is the first series of paintings done on flat calabash surfaces. The flat calabashes are mostly used by the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Boko/Busa and other ethnic groups in West Africa. It is used in packing prepared from millet, corn, cassava, yam, rice, and other food items that are eaten through swallowing. Different realistic, semi abstract landscape and figurative paintings were executed using acrylic paint as a medium. The philosophy behind this painting emanated from the destruction of our environment as a result of man's unfriendly activities that poses a lot of threat to the ecosystem. The choice of the colours used in the landscapes indicates life associated with the survival of man in his environment when properly managed.



Title: Nightmare
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Our comfort
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Survival
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Where is the Hope?
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Our nature
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Who does it better
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023

Stage II: Kere

In this second stage human figures are rendered in realism to express different economic activities especially the exploration of natural resources and the negative effects on man's environment such as oil spillages, and desertification, and many more. The choice of colour and the rendition were heavy kinetic strokes in expressing the volume of damages done to the environment which calls for urgent green practices for sustainable development.



Title: Mai-Nunu
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Our daily bread
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: The dark city II
Acrylic on Calash, 2023



Title: Serenity I
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Ba'a Zenkana
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: Serenity II,
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023

Stage III: Gomboo

The calabash spoon is used by Boko, Bokobaru, Batonou, Fulani, Hausa and other ethnic groups for drinking water, pap, fura, kunu, nunu, and many other liquid foods. The Traditional patterns and motifs used were adopted from Borgu ethnic groups (Bokobaru, Kambari, Boko, Batunou and Busa) to execute abstract, and semi abstract paintings on the long spoons.



Title: The man in red
Acrylic on Calabash Spoon, 2023



Title: Mai Nunu 2
Acrylic on Calabash Spoon, 2023



Title: Back romance I,
Acrylic on Calabash Spoon, 2023



Title: Tell the story,
Acrylic on Calabash Spoon, 2023



Title: Back romance II,
Acrylic on Calabash Spoon, 2023



Title: The Woman
Acrylic on Calabash Spoon, 2023

Stage IV: Zeere

This are gouges of different sizes used for storage of grains, water, liquid foods, floats on water for fishing, storage of powdered traditional medicines. The motifs used are adopted from the traditional Boko/Busa, Batonou and Bokobaru ethnic groups from Kwara, Niger, and Kebbi state. The philosophy behind these paintings is as about greed, ego and hatred that results to different evil activities in society. Red, black and blues are dominant colours used in rendering the abstract forms.



Title: Ba'a Zenkana
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: For the ancestors
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: An elder
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: For the ancestors
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: The Servant
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



Title: The King
Acrylic on Calabash, 2023



CONCLUSION

There is nothing more substantial than for an artist to work with materials that best suit his techniques and interest. However one cannot conveniently claim that particular materials are his favourite especially when he has no worked on other materials Mohammed, (2014), Krtalic, e'tal (2024), Inglese e'tal (2024), and Shafira (2024), upholds that sources of inspiration for artists are obtainable within our own environment and the appropriate places for artists to seek for inspiring sources are certainly within the artist immediate environment. Calabashes of different sizes are grown excessively in the North and North central area of Nigeria for domestic and spiritual purposes; the calabash is a multipurpose and cherished resource with diverse uses extending from containers to decorative purposes and traditional medicine. Its resilient and long-lasting fruits make it a useful and viable utensil for many different uses to this day. Therefore, the surfaces and sizes of the calabash inspired the artist to adopt them as support in painting. This has also shown that calabashes remains a good support in painting just like, canvas, metal panels, glass, wood, stone, human and animal skin, leaves, assorted papers and many other supports in painting which are been used over time. The different calabash form gives room to artist to create painting composition in preferred mediums effectively.

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