

Creative Experimentation: Examples of A Selection of Staff And Students' Work in Textiles and Weaving in The Department of Creative Arts of The University of Maiduguri, 2003-2013

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and selects a dozen staff and students' works in textiles design and weaving in the Department of Creative Arts of University of Maiduguri and attempts to show some of their achievements and creative possibilities. The paper discusses how these achievements can be harnessed in order to enrich the specific art and craft areas, and how these can have positive impact on similar endeavours in future. The selected works span a decade (i.e. 2003-2013) and cover broad areas of textiles and weaving, and similar or related areas. The students' work reviewed are mainly student's Final Year Projects (i.e. CRA 499) and a summary of a half-year of Students' Industrial Work Experience (SIWES) programme carried out in 2013 in Kemta Itoku, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. The selected works highlight a summary of what the author believes were achievements either by lecturers or students who underwent the undergraduate programme of B.A., Creative Arts. This would hopefully create a clearer understanding of other areas that similar programmes can cover, match or surpass in future.

Key Words: Creative Experimentation, Textiles and Weaving

Introduction

Ten years can provide a good overview of the achievements of an academic programme that lasted three decades. It is for this reason that the period of 2003-2013 has been selected for review in this paper. The paper highlights some of the creative efforts of Ashiedu Ogboli, the author of this paper, Nana Hauwa Salawu, variously a weaving instructor, a student in the Department of Creative Arts and now a lecturer in Textiles and Weaving in the Department of Industrial Design. This paper also picks out a particular Students' Industrial Work Experience exercise (for 2013) undertaken in Kemta Itoku, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria and shows how the six candidates who attended the six months' training benefitted from the on-the-job training exercise. Furthermore, specific projects carried out between 2003 and 2013 by students such as Nana Hauwa Salawu (2004), Bornoma (2006), Oneli (2008), Nwanze (2008), Gufu (2009), Saki (2009), Umar (2010), Kosontyav (2010), Haladu (2011), Aigbodion (2011), Anaele (2011), Akoche (2011), Bubaram (2011), Zirawaga (2010), Albert (2012) and Kwapaya (2012) are highlighted.

Criteria for Selection

The work selected was to represent a cross section of academic and experimental activities of students and staff in areas such as weaving, mixed media, assemblage, dyeing, doll production shoe and handbag design and silk screen printing. About fifty students specialised in Textiles and Weaving during this period. Some of the works selected for the study can be categorized into more than one area. For instance Haladu's (2011) study on Karai-Karai puppetry falls into textiles art with application for drama and the theatre, costume design and stage construction and technical manipulation. Kwapaya (2012) explores beads, and the functions and meanings of costumes. Ogboli's work is multi-disciplinary due to his several interests in various artistic fields. One of Ogboli's abiding interests is how to give new meanings to old things; through repackaging and recycling. Similarly, domesticating international idioms and empowering the self and immediate community through the design and production of utilitarian products become paramount.

In the same vein, is a mixed media design entitled *Nigeria at 50* (Plate 1)



Plate 1. Ashiedu Ogboli. Nigeria at 50. A glass cube assemblage 2010. 41cm² x 41cm²



Plate 2. Ashiedu Ogboli. Experimental Printed Fabrics Derived From Nigerian Motifs Textiles Ink on Khaki, Made into Hand Bags 2010.

Nana Hauwa Salawu received her initial training as a traditional Ebira weaver in Okene, Kogi State. She eventually diversified and mastered several other media. An example of her work is the Almanac Calendar (Plate 3)

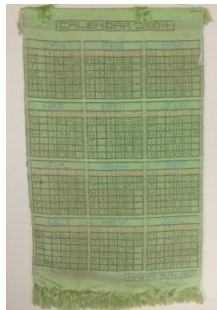


Plate 3. Nana Hauwa Salawu. Woven Textiles Calendar, Cotton and Lurex Threads 2004. 150cm x 59cm

Which demonstrates intricate design planning and execution. She has earned an M A (2014) in Industrial Design from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, and has been appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Industrial Design, University of Maiduguri, where she is continuing her creative efforts in earnest.

Zaliya Bornoma (2006) designed infants' shoes. Product development issues such as measurement, sizing, materials safety in usage, raw materials sourcing, ergonomics, product safety, among others, were explored. In like manner, this write up also singles out the efforts of Guful (2009), Saki (2009) and Umar (2010) as examples of creative experimentation whose end product were shoes of various designs and specification.

Play dolls form a bed rock for a child's development. Studies indicate that a majority of play dolls that Nigerian children use today are made outside the country. Often times, these play dolls do not sufficiently reflect the Nigerian child's cultural experience or environment. The play dolls made in the Department of Creative Arts therefore attempt to fill that void. Anaele (2011) uses inspiration from Igbo culture, to create dolls that can reinforce story telling among children. The Snail, Tortoise, Spider and Weaver Bird are some of the personae of Igbo folklore created during the study. Similarly, Haladu (2011) developed puppets inspired by Karai-Karai culture. These explorations give the students further grounding in their own individual culture. These works are also, often times, pioneer efforts in creating cultural symbolisms that have ethnic meaning to their people. These efforts may be further harnessed in order to develop short plays based on the particular values of the people. They could equally be developed into new formats and media such as comic strips, home video themes, or other forms for public and home entertainment, in addition to serving as instructional materials for various age grades. (Plates, 4 for Anaele, Doll height 35cm, and Plate 5, Haladu with scale/size height 25cm).



Plate 4. Joy Anaele. A Student project on Dolls inspired by Igbo Folklore



Plate 5. Daniel Haladu. A Student Project Play dolls Inspired by Karai-Karai Culture. Height 25cm.

Vivian Kosontyav's (2010) project problem was to create a prototype from which human dolls could be mass-produced. Thereafter, the dolls would be put into use in order to portray Nigeria's numerous and diverse dress cultures on the miniatures. These two aims were achieved. After numerous experiments it was eventually found fiber glass is a suitable material for mold making. Fiber glass molds were made for all parts of the doll by casting from a pre-existing model. Another achievement of the project is that the mold enables an infinite mass production of the doll on an industrial scale. (Plate 6 with scale/size height 23cm)



Plate 6. Vivan Kosontyav. A Cast doll dressed in a dress representative of a Nigerian ethnic group Height 23cm

On the final analysis, the dolls are dressed in any chosen attire typical of any Nigerian ethnic group, in order to serve as a beautification or a decorative item, a gift or a teaching and learning aid.

Ifeoma Oneli's (2008) Final Year Project on male adults' shoes explores the use of khaki material for making shoe tops with flexible hard and durable soles. Similarly, Zirawaga, (2010) explores design and production of adult female shoes. These ready-to wear shoes could be mass produced by a cottage industry in order to provide employment and cash empowerment to the local economy(Plate 7).



Plate 7. Front cover of a Student Final year project of the Department of Creative Arts University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Nana HauwaSalawu (2003-2013) trained initially as a traditional Ebira weaver. She is a specialist on the upright loom. She has diversified her oeuvre on other types of loom such as the floor and table looms on which she experiments with lurex and other threads.

The Students' Industrial Work Experience (S I W E S) At Kemta Itoku Abeokuta Ogun State

Hereunder is an example of what the student could benefit by on-the-job training outside the usual classroom and studio situation. Prior to this particular posting, students of the Department of Creative Arts of University of Maiduguri have had postings at Kemta Itoku Abeokuta in OgunState. Previous experience showed that this particular posting and similar ones were particularly beneficial in an easy to assess manner.

Therefore, five students specializing in Textiles and Weaving , namely: Peace Yohanna, Grace Garba, Ruqqayya Danjuma, Elizabeth Kefas and Azimbe Usman received approval for their posting to Madam D Cottage Textiles Industry at Kemta Itoku, Abeokuta. The centre is run by a seasoned professional textiles designer. The mainstay of the cottage industry is the production of tie-and-dye (Kampala) fabrics and starch resist or wax resist fabrics, which are designed on the spot and sold immediately or exported to markets within Nigeria and overseas. The students on Industrial Training joined other trainees and apprentices from various backgrounds in the workshop. Madam D's textiles design workshop is one of several of such workshops in the location. There is therefore, a great deal of cross fertilization of ideas and cooperation in the design and production effort. A token fee is paid in order for a prospective trainee to secure a placement. Apart from the daily supervision by the proprietress and other experts on ground, clients are encouraged to contribute their criticisms or suggestions. Specific commissions are sometimes given by prospective buyers who purchase by the unit or on wholesale basis. During that particular training programme, Professor O.O. Badejo, Director, S I W E S, of the University of Maiduguri visited the students twice.

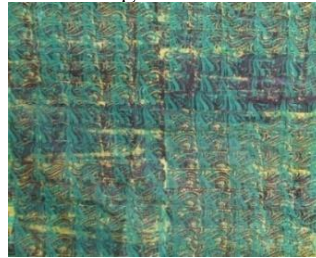


Plate 8. A Screen printed fabric executed by a Student specializing in Textiles and Weaving in 2012.

The achievements of that exercise include:

- The students were exposed to a different geographical and cultural setting which they are familiar with in the North East of Nigeria.
- They encountered an environment where theory and practice were brought together in immediate artistic harmony.
- The students reported that the programme improved their studio practice experience in an easy-to-follow realistic manner, thereby reinforcing their proficiency and professional confidence.
- The students were empowered to create their own products and sell them as they pleased.
- The students established a network of professional colleagues and other associates.

Findings

Sufficient examples of staff and students works demonstrate that a great deal of potentials exist within the diversity hereby highlighted. Many of the achievements in the areas highlighted by the paper show that they can be explored further either in an academic setting or in a professional studio, training workshop or on an industrial scale. There is sufficient know-how with which to establish viable production lines. However, adequate and appropriate studio and workshop spaces will have to be built and funded.

Recommendation

The studies highlighted in this paper reflect only a limited number of achievements in the wider Department of Creative Arts which its programmes have been by and large wound down. It is hereby suggested that in-depth study be carried out on other areas in order to sieve out the viable resources and information they might hold. There would also be the challenge in carrying on the viable areas in the new academic departments and in other arms of the university such as the Entrepreneurship Centre.

Conclusion

Most of the projects mentioned in this paper demonstrate a good level of creative and academic achievement. As noted earlier, they are all undergraduate efforts, whose main aim was to provide appropriate grounding at the Bachelor of Arts level. Many of them can be taken further to a more advanced level. The end result showed that some cottage industries can be built from scratch, and can be based exclusively on locally available talent and man power, materials, equipment and design. Similarly, many of the findings could provide massive employment opportunities if they are properly harnessed into Nigeria's march for economic diversification, technological development and growth.

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