

Tiv Dance Forms: A Modulation of Form in Painting

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Abstract

This essay is an investigation of the dance form practiced by the Tiv people of Benue state. The Tiv are a people whose history has been traced to the Congo. So the essay highlights briefly the story of the Tiv people. This paper also looks at the transformation of Tiv dances which are a performing art to visual and or fine arts (painting). The main thrust of the paper however, is to recreate and present Tiv dance a painterly forms. This paper hopefully will break new frontier in the representation of Tiv dance, a performing art into visual art form. Data for this research were gathered from cultural organizations and educational institutions in Benue state. In the studio, the artist explored the Tiv dance forms and patterns with a view to translating them into visually dramatic paintings.

Keywords: Dance, form, modulation, painting, Tiv

Introduction

This study investigates the dance forms and patterns practiced by the Tiv people of Benue state. The Tiv are dynamic both culturally and politically. In the Middle Belt axis alone more than 30 different ethnic groups co-exist, each with a peculiar tradition. With such differences in tradition, there are bound to be differences in their architecture, modes of dressing, facial marks, body decorations, utilitarian arts and dance forms. This study examines some selected types of dance ("*amar*") in Tiv land, with its attendant view of creating painterly forms.

The Tiv are a people whose history has been traced to the Congo. Though there is no universally accepted version of the origin of Tiv people, they are said to have descended from a progenitor called *Tukuruku*. Oral traditions have so far been more plausible and appealing, except that views differ as there are so many oral traditions. Others have accepted that *shon* was the first person that originated from the original deity or Supreme Being. *Aondo shon* said to have given birth to, many children amongst who were the Tiv, *Uke* (foreigners) and later the whites *Buter*. Tiv is further said to have given birth to two sons, *Ichongu* and *Ipusu* (Hagher, 1990). This prestigious man called Tiv, left Congo to Cameroun, and was settled at a place called Swem in Cameroun, where he died and his children not happy to bury their father or leave him behind burnt his corps and packed the ashes together with that of his father Takuruku Nyamazenga in a small pot and traveled along with it to this part of Africa where today they are called citizens (East, 2003). The version that commands popularity and most current is that which traces their origin to the Bantu people who once inhabited the central African continent in the Shaba area of the present democratic republic of Congo. The popularity and recentness of this version is due to the assorted pieces of evidences supporting it. One of such evidences is linguistics. Abraham (1934) compiled a list of 64 Tiv word and juxtaposed them with those of the Bantu Nyaza. There was a striking similarity in both phonetics and semantics. Based on this evidence a conclusion is drawn that the Tiv were real Bantu and that they came from Congo (Igirgi, 2007).

Artists have painted dances from different traditions. Some have painted dancing figures with bias to particular cultures or dance forms. Others have painted dancing figures alongside their musicians and musical instruments. This essay makes a deliberate attempt at problem statement, a transforming of the Tiv dances which are a performing art to visual and or fine arts (painting). The paper aims to recreate Tiv dance into painterly forms; present Tiv dance in a visual art form. Emergent paintings are hoped, will be inspired by 'Swange' and 'Dagbera' dance forms and patterns.

Conceptual Framework

This paper is premised on notable strategies which are provided by the Impressionist movement and has a direct bearing on this artist's works, paying attention to the concept of capturing moment's impressions. Impressionism is a reaction to the sometimes brutal and chaotic transformation of French life that occurred during the latter half of the 19th century. Like most arts' of the 19th century this art was an art of industrialized, urbanized Paris a reaction to contemporaneous conditions. Kleiner (2011) avers that accordingly, Impressionist works represent an attempt to capture a fleeting moment-not in the absolutely fixed, precise sense of a realist painting but by conveying the elusiveness and

impermanence of images and conditions. The attempts made by artists to lift the figures and scenery off the page and prove undeniably that art is not rigid (Candler, 1954 in the-artists.org, 2016). This saw significant innovations and changes in compositional style. Though they had unique approaches to fusion of movement in their art, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Claude Monet did so with the intention of being a realist. These artists of the 1800s initiated those changes in the Impressionist movement.

Core to this author's influence are the techniques of the Impressionist and the aforementioned artists. According Cavendish, (1985) Degas is quoted as saying "they call me the painter of dancers. They don't understand that the dancer has been for me a pretext for painting pretty fabrics and for rendering movement". Degas sums up the intention of his paintings: their importance lies not just in the subject-matter, no matter how descriptive or provocative that might be. For when Edgar painted a dancer, it was not the dance that attracted him, but the spectacle of a body in space, and the difficulties of changing it into art (Cavendish, 1985). Such effects serve the artist in this paper with requisite strategies for accentuating his interest in the *angeer* (Tiv fabric), flywhisks and *dagbera raffia* among other influences to produce current paintings.

Review of Literature

Dance and its significance to Tiv culture should start with a definition of dance as given by the Tiv people themselves. In Tiv culture, the closest word to dance defined in English has rhythmic or pattern movement performance, as an end in itself is *amar*, or *Ishol*. This concept of dance relates the phenomenon of dancing to a game hence, *Ishol* means game. There are different types of *amar*, in Tiv land. Essentially, there existed so many Tiv traditional music and dance forms or groups before the emergence of Swange. Notably, these music and dances that preceded Swange are variously called *amar a Ibyameh*, *amara Ange*, *amar a Ingyôugh* (*Ingyôugh*), *amar a Ankeredede*, *amar a Anchanakupa*, *amar a Girinya*, et cetera (Tsevende, Agber, Iorngurum, and Ugbagir, 2013).

Ibyamegh

Tsevende, Agber, Iorngurum, and Ugbagir, (2013) maintained that, Ibyamegh was a Tiv religious rite which tradition demanded that the intending initiator must be a product of *Yam* 'she (exchange marriage) who would first consult the High Priest (*or-Byam*, *orakombo-Biam* or *Tor-Biam*) with official presents such as *Bua* Tiv (Tiv cow). The Ibyamegh religious rite was accompanied with music and dance also referred to as *Ibyamegh*. Songs pattern accompanying this form of music and dance is called *Imo Biam* (songs of Biam).

Ange

Ange, from the time of their evolution into Tiv traditional music and dance by Utuku Agire till date have not significantly entertained changes both in context, contents and intent. The term Ange carries a plural form and is used only as plural. Ange are basically dance oriented, and are more concerned with traditional aspects of Tiv worldview and life, (Nyiste, 2006). Nyiste explains that the Ange song form freed the society from the unquestionable belief in age and sex as major determiners of one's role in the society. Ange performers were concerned with inculcating communal values as against individualism.

Ingyôugh

Ingyôugh literally means kwashiorkor; a disease that makes one emaciated and develops a potbelly so fat and large. Tsevende, Agber, Iorngurum, and Ugbagir, (2013) say, the Tiv people used to *tuhwa* or (deride somebody) "*nenge alu ka hi angbor er ingyôugh kôr ú we*" (look at your potbelly like you are suffering from ingyôugh disease)". Higher (1980) describes Ingyôugh as:

a vigorous dance for men which entail severe body distortions, as dancers while keeping beat to music, they suddenly seem to throw all their limbs in disarray, the face is distorted with the eyes sunk, nose dilated and tongue limply hanging from the mouth, hands are held out at stiff angles to the body, stomach is swollen and made to extend at unusual angles to the body; the effect of these dancers, is as if they are working corpses.

An oral tradition has it that a Tiv traditional doctor was known to hospitalise the Ingyôugh patients, giving them medications and proper feeding. In the course of time, these Ingyôugh patients organised themselves in a group that evolved into a cult. This was essentially, in order to overcome stigmatization. Tsevende, Agber, Iorngurum, and Ugbagir, (2013) explains that the Ingyôugh cult organised a play group that use to dance and entertain themselves and other village folks. In addition,

these fellows looked quite hilarious, and their dance was humorous so they instituted regulations associated with myths and witchcraft, which provided that spectators who watched them dance did not laugh; and if they did, they must pay a fine and failure to do so led to the contraction of Ingyôugh sickness. Importantly, few Ingôugh patients like Izua Gbe and Anshira Akuji discovered that their calamity became a source of income and as a result introduced proper dancing steps into the music (Tsevende, Agber, Iorngurum, and Ugbagir, 2013). Ingyôugh has since then evolved from a comedic form of Tiv traditional music and dance narrative pioneered by Anshira Akuji in about 1902; and grown in stages between 1919, 1931 into the 1960s. Ingyôugh has been promoted by Benue Council for Arts and Culture since then.

Diga

Diga, literally is a borrowed term from English digger. The Tiv term for *diga* is *AtseNór* (elephant hoe). *Diga* is a farm implement also used in construction, which falls in the class of *Bwagi* (*Bogi* or *Bwadi*), *Kpera-Ba*, *Gbyom Gater* and '*Shom I shin 'Nya*.

Diga is a mimetic dance for both men and women, and was introduced when force labour was organised by the colonial government during the 30s to build the railways and mine the tin on the Jos Plateau (Hagher, 2003). The term *Diga* evolved into a form of music and dance initiated by Viashima Alô from Mbausu in *tar* Mbera, Akighir Tswam Ayu, the legendary Paregh Adaga and Dodo Aswe from *tar* Iharev. According to the veterans (during a verbal interview with Viashima, 1995) the idea of this music and dance was conceived in June 1929 to reduce tension from forced labour.

Girinya

Girinya is a traditional cult music and dance strictly for men and women of valor distinguished by their dexterity in Ityav (war), Biem (organised group hunting) general adventures. Invariably, to be initiated into this music and dance, you must be *nomor* or *nomkwase* (strong man or strong woman), implying that you must have in your lifetime accomplished great feat and or killed an enemy or enemies in battles (Ityav); or killed *nyam-azov* (spirit beast) like lion, deer, hyena or elephant in a hunting competition (Biem) or in an *uvaan-u-yer-an* (deadly deserting jungle).

Nyiste (2006) reported that the Girinya did not originate in Tiv land. It was borrowed from the Kwa-speaking people of Ogoja in the late 19th century. It was adapted by the Tiv of Gaav and Kunav. Girinya was used to mobilise warriors to repulse the Kwa during wars in the late 19th century. She further notes that Girinya depends on drum language, accompanied by the horns, which only the initiate can decipher. Though membership of Girinya cult is not restricted, only few women are initiates. Girinya dance today is started by highlighting a solo dancer moving towards musicians. He stops abruptly on a pre-arranged signal usually by listening to the drum, (Tsevende, Agber, Iorngurum, and Ugbagir, (2013).

Significantly, this paper for the sake of clarity, delves into understanding these generations of Tiv music and dance. The Kwaghalom songs, music and dance marked the beginning of the first generation Tiv music, which ended with Ibyamegh. The chronicles of the second generation started from Ange to Ankeredede. Apparently, the third generation started from Gbanyi to Swange. Astonishingly, Swange music and dance has stood tall and high, dynamically making the fourth generation Tiv traditional music and dance.

All the different dances in Tiv are categorized in their historical and artistic context by well-chosen names. These names either relate to their functions, history, or artistic requirement. Practically every aspect of Tiv life and society is accompanied by dance and the whole community engages in dancing from one occasion to another. Dance is not an art form exclusive to a specific age-set or sex. Neither do the Tiv prohibit the enjoyment or participation in dance to a specific class (Hagher, 2003).

Theory and Aesthetics of Tiv Dance

Hagher (2003) summarized the aesthetics criteria of Tiv dance: In Tiv dance aesthetic male dance should be full of energy, possess nimbleness of feet, and have endurance and speed. A man's dance is appreciated if he dances *Shaager* with a lot of force, and with harmony, *Vough Vough*. The man should hold up his head tall and proudly, *Sha iceen*. Failure to observe this consideration results in bad dancing without harmony, speed or pride, described by Tiv as *dan dan* the female dance attracts different aesthetics criteria. According to Hagher (2003), the female, dances are expected to be soft, steady and smooth, interpreted in Tiv as *lugh lugh*, smoothly and *kule kule* steadily. Failure to observe the criteria results in bad dancing which means dancing bad, sloppy, sluggish movement. The worst form of bad dancing among the women is dancing too softly and too fast. The first quality of dancing too softly is called dancing *gbedoo gbedoo* which is dancing timidly. Dancing too fast is also bad

dancing and the woman is accused of dancing *jimba jimba* or lascivious, immoral dancing. Throughout, a balance must be maintained and fine distinction emphasized by musical accompaniment between good and bad dancing.

Review of Related Works

The European Painters' account



Fig.1 Edouard Manet, “Le Ballet Espagnol”, Oil on canvas, 1000 x 662cm, 1862
(Source: www.manet.org)

It is almost impossible to state that Manet's work belongs to any one era or style of art. One of his paintings that is truly on the brink of a new style is *Le Ballet Espagnol* (1862). The figure's contours coincide with their gestures as a way to suggest depth in relation to one another and in relation to the setting. Manet also accentuates the lack of balance in this work (Fig.1) to project to the viewer that he or she is on the edge of a moment that is seconds away from passing. The blurred, hazy sense of colour and shadow in this work similarly place the viewer in a fleeting moment. Manet's work relates to the essay at hand so also is his use of stage configuration, hence setting a compositional impetus for the artist in this paper.



Fig.2 Edgar Degas, “Four Dancers”, Unknown, 1902,
(Source: Cavendish, M. (1985). *The Great Artists*)

Edgar Degas is believed to be the intellectual extension of Manet, but more radical for the impressionist community. Degas' subjects are the epitome of the perfect example of the Impressionist era; he finds great inspiration in images of ballet dancers and horse races. In *Four Dancers* (Fig.2) Degas came close up to his figure using brilliantly coloured pastels in boldly hatching lines. To achieve the effect he wanted, Degas would dampen his pastels with steam from a kettle, rub them with his fingers and build up crusts of colour with scribbles and hatchings. Although this account does not touch on Swange and Dagbera on a specific note, the seemingly blurring of edges and forms as a result is however, worthy of emulation by the artist under study. The reason was that this blurring of forms and edges enhances motion.

The Nigerian Painters' account



Fig.3 Benedict Chuka Enwonwu, "Olokun", Oil on canvas, 183 x 49cm, 1973,
(Source: The Nucleus, National collection of Federal Department of Culture)

Enwonwu can be described as a painter and sculptor who worked in the realistic style for some time. The pre-independence struggles for actualization and self-identity are largely responsible for his change of style. In most of his paintings of African dances he portrays the human figure distorted rhythmically. Among the paintings are *African Dance* 1971, *Aghogho Nmuo* 1951/1952, *Black is Beauty Olokun* and *Negritude*. Enwonwu strongly believes that Nigerian artists should express their cultural identity through the use of Western techniques without copying Western arts (Dike, 1998). In his works one sees a blending of a conceptual art with the perceptual ones. Enwonwu in *Olokun* (Fig.3) describes a dance form of Yoruba origin.

There is an elongation of forms of the lead subject. One tends to feel some sense of professional inefficiency. The figure is clothed with the *aso oke* fabric and is painted in vibrant colours which push the figure forward. The other dancing figures can be seen in the background, looking less identifiable. The incorporation of linear patterns both at the top and bottom of the painting creates some measure of agitations and movement. *Olokun* seems to be a feminine dance, and of an endeavour undertaken erect perhaps. *Olokun* though a detailed account of a dance does not touch on Tiv dance at any level. As the Tiv feminine dance *Telegh Ishol* referring to the smooth coordination of the whole body movements in a low down to the ground twisting, curving and straightening movement, matched to the music with precision.



Fig.4 Jimoh Bola Akolo, "Igior", Wood Print, 1975,
(Source: The Nucleus, National collection of Federal Department of culture)

Akolo's painting of *Tiv Dance* is an adaptation of cultural imagery that depicts traditional dance forms of the *Igior* dance from Benue State. The 1995 exhibition at the National Gallery, Lagos, which marked his 60th birthday showed the continuity and intensity of his vision in both form and content as rooted in African images. He employs bold and effective figures using elements of colour contrast to achieve two-dimensional depth in painting. Akolo in *Igior* (Fig.4) uses silhouettes to describe the masculine Tiv dance. There is a show of measured force with their whole body, typical of the Tiv male dance. *Igior* a wood print is monochromatic. This print, though an informative account of Tiv masculine dance, lacks colour modulation of forms.



Fig.5 Oshinowo Kolade, Ritual Dance, Oil on canvas, 92 x 122cm, 1975,
(Source: The Nucleus, National collection of Federal Department of Culture)

Kolade is a prominent master of the naturalistic stream in African contemporary arts. His use of colour is of the college trained tradition, in which all rules about what comes next to what is seen to have been meticulously followed. However his understudy of the Western masters appears also to guide his colourism, which in some of his compositions is selective but highly self-sufficient for what turns out to be multi-layered chromatic statements. In *Ritual Dance* (Fig.5) Kolade depicts a dance form that is presumably Yoruba and seems feminine. The costume here resembles that of *Olokun*. In this painting however, there is no clear distinction between the figures. The painting is made up of families of red and yellow with dark browns at the foreground, making it seem as if it is an evening scene. *Ritual Dance* just like *Olokun*, does not touch on Tiv dance at any level.

Methodology

The methodology for this research is practice-based research methodology. According to Sullivan (2005), one of the best articulators of the theory of visual arts practice, the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research. This means that having gone to the field and studied the selected Tiv dance forms, the operation carried out on these raw data in the studio is a form of research. So if the artist has used the studio to find out form, from various compositions and interacted with his colours between palette and his canvas, this activity amounts to research. The work categorised, reviewed and analysed as reference document can be reported. The product (paintings) would be submitted alongside a complementary writing.

Data collection

The primary data for this research are gathered from cultural organizations in Benue state, such as Benue State Arts Council and Benue State Ministry of Information. While secondary data was collected from the Theatre Arts Department, Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State Library. Photographs, pictures from newspaper, magazine pages, calendar pages, internet, catalogue and video were also studied.

Analytical Explanation of Paintings

This research being a studio based exploration, takes note of media like pencil studies, pen and ink studies Plate 1. The watercolour studies of the “dagbera” Plate 2 which possess strong lashes, suggestive of the rowdy appearance the raffia from the masquerade presents while in motion. As a result there is a preponderance of some organic forms.

Graphite, and Pen and Ink Studies

Plate: 1



Amos Saghevwa Agaku, Swange III, Pencil study,
21cm x 29cm, 2004.



Amos Saghevwa Agaku, Dagbera I, Pencil study,
21cm x 29cm, 2004.



Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Swange II, Pencil study, 21cm x 29cm, 2004.



Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Dagbera V, Pencil study, 21cm x 29cm, 2004.

Water Colour Studies



Plate: 2 Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Dagbera IV, watercolour, 21cm x 29cm, 2004.

In Plate 2 the artist attempts to capture the rigorous movement(s) undertaken by the masquerade. The artist engages yellow, green, families of blue, purple, red and families of brown hues. The surface here is largely filled up with thin and thick brush strokes, and smeared brush works of these colours. There are however, omissions in certain parts of the work; from the top left hand side of the painting, the omission of colour creates an open field in the background. Towards the middle the omission gives one a feeling of the masquerade's highlight. In between the two omitted spaces is a mask head which looks isolated and falling diagonally rightwards. The effect(s) created by the curvy colour smears, overlaps and thick and thin application of the water colour indicates the raffia and the charging movement of the Dagbera: which is usually an admixture of up and down and front and back jerks. The overall appearance of this work put the viewer expecting the masquerade to pop out of the paper support. The work's fluffy look earns the painting a resemblance with Andy Warhol's wig or Warhol's wig logo of some sort.



Plate: 3 Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Swange III, water colour, 21cm x 29cm, 2004,

In Swange III the artist presented figures of dancers and their body contours with their gestures as a way to depict movement in relation to one another and in relation to the Swange pattern. He also accentuates the balance in the work (Plate 3) to project to the audience that they are witnessing a moment that will pass almost immediately. Saghevwua employs the use of families of blue, violet, purple, red, orange, yellow, ochre and families of brown. The artist again uses brush strokes of these colours, only this time, he fills up the background with geometric forms. Starting from the left hand side of the painting where it is dense and graduates gradually to the right where it is scanty. For the foreground he devised the smearing brush effect to depict the undulations of the ground, the shadows of his figures and the motion that exists as a result of the activities of their limbs. The artists literal use of black and white for the angeer costume worn by the dancers gives rise to fleeting glimpses that

tend to shimmer. The activities of the dancers lower limbs and the appearance of black and white in the painting places the onlooker in a fleeting moment.

Swange (Plate: 3) presents motifs, geometric forms and lines. These spark up a visual motion, which is depicted by postures of the dancers. There is a visible rotational movement in their gesture. As one looks at the painting, the first figure at the left hand side is in a frontal position suggesting that the dancer has just negotiated a turn. The second figure, a female whose side is showing has completed the turn. The third figure begins another turn. The fourth figure is able to complete the movement as he appears in a three quarter profile.

Final Works



**Plate: 4 Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Dagbera IV, Oil on canvas, 124cmx244cm, 2004,
(Location: Ogboli's Collection)**

Plate: 4 exhibits a textured approach in its production process. This work utilized only neutrals, depicting background, foreground and the subject in families of brown and grey. This was born out of the want for getting a natural look for the environment's colours in this work. In the background are broken appearances of strokes, which were executed by the artist's manipulation of his palette knife. The same impasto technique is used in achieving the undulating ground look of the foreground. The curvy rendition employed in the previous work (Plate: 2) is also engaged in this painting; only this time oil colour takes precedence. Just as the previous work in (Plate: 2) the masquerade looks as if it will bulge out of the canvas. Unlike the diaphanous media previously used, here the raffia and the charging movement of the Dagbera, is textured.



**Plate: 5 Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Swange III, Oil on canvas, 124cmx244cm 2004,
(Location: Gbaden's Collection)**

Swange III tries to assert itself as an approximate closeness of nature and or 'the' natural. The blues, orange, browns, and neutrals used in this painting have been toned into shades and tints, unlike in the previous painting (Plate: 3) where colours maintained a substantial level of purity. In the background the artist still employs the impasto approach displays a gradation of families of blue, orange and gray. For the figures, he engages their gesture to depict movement in relation to the Swange pattern. The artist's use of black and white again causes the angeer to shimmer; as a consequence giving rise to vibrating sensations. The foreground is a combination of smeared and broken patches of browns, and the activities of the lower limbs. That moment that was seconds away from passing in the previous water media work is somewhat delayed in this painting; despite this delay there is however, that temptation of the viewer wanting to join the dancers due largely to the size of the canvas.

Details of surface texture

Plate: 6



Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Swange III, Photography,
18cm x 25.4cm, 2004,



Amos Saghevwua Agaku, Dagbera, IV Photography,
18cm x 25.4cm, 2004,

In Plate: 6 a close view of the surface quality reveals the technique(s) employed in the production of the oil paintings. These detailed photos also describe the additional quality(s) of the oil colours over the diaphanous medium. On a design level watch as the artist engages impasto to flow through the various compositional schemes of the work.

Conclusion

The techniques used in the execution of these works are: oil on canvas (impasto), water colour, pencil drawings, pen and ink drawings and mixed media. The choice of media is to enable the artist translate the salient movements inherent in dance into visual forms. The artist also tried to employ the use of such visual elements as line, colour, shape, form, texture et cetera. Some of the series display Tiv motifs which are derivative of geometric shapes, linear forms and patterns. This paper views the artist as able to present the Tiv dance in a visually dramatic style. One is reminded of the elements that characterize the swinging and twisting of fly whisks the colours and line depiction of dance movements in the resultant paintings, just as in Degas *Four Dancers* where he came close up to his figure using brilliantly coloured pastels in boldly hatching lines. Agitation created especially by the lines of “Dagbera” distinctive of the masquerade dance movements forms the thrust of the *Dagbera* composition. This is like whenever Degas painted a dancer, it was not the dance that attracted him, but the spectacle of a body in space, and the difficulties of changing it into art that was his focus. The essay shows the different dance movements of Dagbera and Swange showing how the costumes play on the dance forms accentuate and enhance the dance movements in painting.

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