

EXPLORATION OF SELECTED FROG PATTERNS IN PAINTING

Zumnan Sekuk

Abstract

This visual exploration in painting using coloured patterns of selected a frog species, is an overview of pattern formation on frogs as a source of inspiration for contemporary painting. Over the years, artists have come up with various methods of expression. Gardner (1980) points out that from pre-historic time to the present, mankind has been much involved with nature and its elements such as visual form, shapes, patterns and images. The exploration of the frogs colour pattern in painting as a subject of artistic contemplation is with the view of scrutinizing carefully the pattern formation of various frogs beyond its scientific appreciation. This is with the desire to create images of artistic potential derived from the colour pattern formation on the skin of the frog as a source of inspiration for exploration in painting. A review of works and literature was undertaken to show and appreciate the contribution made by painters in the study of nature. A studio based methodology was adopted in conflating needed with information for this study which included paintings, sketches, drawings based on direct visual study of selected specie of frog. Photographs were also manipulated to create the body of works for this research. It also provided information on the systematic approach to the study. Different conventional media were used to carry out the exploration. Works derived from the exploration are presented in plates. The study has through the use of frogs' colour pattern produced paintings and created a postmodernist concept for contemporary Nigerian Art. Also, it reveals that patterns on frogs can be juxtaposed to form a composition of aesthetic value and create a new vista of aesthetic design.

Key Words: Exploration, Frogs (Amphibians), Patterns, Illusionistic, Textures (Tactile)

Introduction

Current trends in the field of art have gone beyond imagination in terms of the use of media, concepts and techniques. Painters are in constant search for new concepts through diverse sources of inspiration; nature to some has been that source of inspiration. Textural qualities of natural forms like trees, rocks among others also serve as sources of inspiration for artists. Patterns found on frogs alongside, colours are elements that inspired this exploration.

Mock (2013) notes that, frogs belong to a group of animals called Amphibians and can be found all over the world and in every climate except Antarctica. They are both aquatic and terrestrial in nature, meaning they can be found on land and in any body of fresh water. Scientists believe that there are more than 4,000 different species of frogs, they are of different species and colours spotting just about every colour in the rainbow, some are yellow, while others are either in any combination of brown, red, orange, black. Some have the ability to camouflage and change colour. They are often patterned with bold stripes and spots which form interesting patterns of aesthetic potentials. The ability of the frogs to change their colour, like the chameleon is as a result of light, temperature, humidity, or even mood. Fear or excitement can also make some frogs change colour. Bird (2012) notes that the changes in colour are created by special pigment cells called chromatophores. These changes in colours give frogs the ability to blend into their surroundings making detection or recognition more difficult. Frogs, as part of nature are of great importance to humans.

Background of the study

Over the years, artists have come up with various methods of expression. Gardner (1980) points out that from pre-historic times to the present, mankind has been involved with nature and its elements such as visual forms, shapes, patterns and images which are traceable to as far as the representation on the cave walls of Altamira. Gushem (1990) notes that some artists drew and painted subjects from wildlife which is also an aspect of nature. He goes further to say that, quite a number of patterns are natural in existence. Thus, Nature has been the foremost source of inspiration in art practice. Nature, as defined by the Encarta Encyclopedia (2009) is the physical world including all natural phenomena and living things.

Nature is all around us and deep within us; we are inseparable from nature. The Exploration of nature in art can take endless forms because nature is such an immense topic that encompasses so many things. For example, artists from as early as the fifteenth century derived inspiration from their environment. The outcome of such inspiration is obvious in the works of artist like Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Pierre Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, and Eugene Boudin. In Nigeria and particularly the Zaria school painters who have been inspired by nature include: Jerry Buhari, Philip Gushem, and Jacob Jari, Abafra Gurin and Susan Dingba among others.

Some artists who used frogs or incorporated frogs in their paintings include: Johannes Støetter, Aviji Bera, Otto Marseus Vanshrieck, Frank Beifus, Rebecca Rees, Caroline Jumhour, Shari Erickson, Chris Hamman, Nick Gustafson, Bruce Herman and Mary Anne Whittle. The exploration of selected frogs' colour pattern in painting, as the subject of artistic contemplation is carried out with a view to scrutinizing carefully the pattern formation of various frogs. This is with the desire to create images of artistic potentials derived from frogs' colour pattern as source of inspiration for exploration in painting. The frog, as an element of nature from which the artist draws inspiration, is endowed with a variety of interesting lines, forms, shapes, patterns and textures which have visual aesthetic values. This paper therefore, focuses on the colour pattern formation on selected species of frogs for expression in painting.

Gatto, Porter and Selleck (1978) stress that patterns can be used to describe a wide variety of visual experiences and human activity. They observe that, "we see consistently elements in clothing design, wall paper covering, jewelry and ornaments and all kinds of natural objects such as plants and animals. Patterns therefore are worth imitating as models for making something or an artistic figure".

The patterns on frogs which are reflected as either smooth, rough, broken or spotted, also give a visual feeling of a tactile textural effect.

Statement of the problem

Artists over the years have used frogs as a source of inspiration to create painting(s). Artist like Johannes Støetter, Aviji Bera, Otto Marseus Vanshrieck, Frank Beifus, Rebecca Rees, Caroline Jumhour, Shari Erickson, Nick Gustafson, among others, used frogs as subjects or incorporated frogs in their paintings. Yet, it is observed that despite the appealing nature of the colourful patterns on such frogs, artist have not fully explored and exhausted the possibilities of adopting the patterns to come up with creative works that are novel.

This paper is unaware of any scholarly or in-depth study carried out on the colour pattern formation of frogs within and outside Nigeria. Hence, the exploration in painting using the coloured patterns observed in selected frog species.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to develop paintings from identified textural qualities of selected species of frogs. While the specific objectives are to:

Create forms stemming from the exploration using the coloured patterns of selected frogs to produce paintings that have illusionistic textured effect.

Create paintings that are of abstract concept in contemporary Nigeria art using coloured patterns of frogs.

Conceptual framework

The focus of this paper is to develop paintings from coloured patterns of selected species of frogs. The work is geared towards making abstract representation and interpretations that find anchorage in abstract expressionism. The term "Abstract Expressionism" is greatly associated with the twentieth century arts and is described by Chilvers (1999) as a form of art that does not depict recognizable scenes or objects, but instead, is made up of shapes, forms and colours that exist for their own expressive sake. He affirms that decorative arts can be described as abstract.

Abstract expressionism connotes art without recognizable images and does not adhere to the limits of conventional forms. Ochigbo (2006) also adds that, the root of abstract expressionism is in the totality of nonfigurative work of Russian-born painter, Wassily Kandinsky, whose exploration of the possibilities of abstraction makes him one of the most important innovators in modern art and a pivot in the development of abstract Art.

The Artist adopts the concept of nonfigurative abstract painting of Wassily Kandinsky, where he explores the values and relationship between colours, using a chromatic palette of intense pigments and a geometric approach. The studio exploration begins from the artist's awareness of Kandinsky's abstract art concept where a visual language of form, colour and line are employed to create compositions that exist with a degree of independence from recognisable visual references.

Review of Related Works

The review acknowledges the contribution of artists who have painted frogs or incorporated frogs in their works with emphasis on their aesthetic relevance.

“Tropical Frog”



**Fig. 1:” Tropical frog”, Artists: Johannes Stoetter, Medium: Body painting
Size: Not given**

Source: <http://www.ilovebodyart.com/tropical-frog-bodypainting-johannes-stoetter>

What may look like an incredible close-up photograph of exotic wildlife in nature is actually a composition of people who have been cleverly painted in green hue with patches of black patterns from head to toe before strategically posing them to look like a large frog resting on a large green leaf. The astonishingly detailed artwork titled “Tropical frog” (fig 1) is created by Johannes Stoetter. He used five people to recreate the lifelike tropical tree frog. One figure is placed on either side in the centre, acting as the frog's backbone, while two other figures are placed on either side crouched on the floor, acting as the frog's hind legs. Two more figures are in an upright position on either side of the 'backbone' with their arms and hands strategically placed to replicate the fore limbs.

The dominant green background of a textured leaf serves as the visual connection between the frog and its habitat which is normally flourishing vegetation as a result of constant water availability. Harmony in the composition is achieved through the systematic use of colour. The use of green, yellow, orange and splotches of black all interconnect without disrupting the overall composition.

“Rainbow Frog”



Fig: 2

Artist: Nick Gustafson, **Title:** Rainbow frog, **Medium:** Prisma Marker and Ink, **Size:** unknown

Source: fineartamerica.com/art/all/rainbow

Year: Not given

The composition (Fig 2) titled “Rainbow Frog” by Nick Gustafson, can be described as a very colourful frog on a textured leaf. The vibrant colours possessed by the frog might suggest that the frog is highly poisonous. The realistically rendered frog is outlined using black ink giving it a graphic outlook. The hind limbs are rendered using pointillism a technique of using coloured dots to suggest the textures of an object.

Green, which is a colour, associated with nature, is seen playing a vital role in this painting as captured in the textured leaf and represents the colour of the vegetation in which frogs can be found: The intricate movement of lines both as veins on the leaf and the background gives the whole work a unique textural effect.

From the review of related works, it is observed that almost all the paintings reviewed portray a realistic image of the frog. This therefore sets the work of this article apart from the status quo as the paintings produced are focused on an abstract exploration/rendition of the coloured patterns observed on the frogs

Methodologies

This work was based on studio experimentation that is practice based. The works created were categorized into five (5) stages which are:

Representational stage

Exploration stage

Developmental stage

Geometric stage

Diffused Abstraction Stage

Population

The population of this study consists of five species of frogs identified in the savannah region,

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample for this paper consists of five species of frogs found in the savannah region, which include; Leopard Frog, African Bull Frog, African Reed Frog, Poison Dart Frog, and the Cricket Frog. The judgmental or purposive sampling technique was used, and the selection of the species was based on their availability, artist interest and their aesthetic qualities.

Instruments for data collection

The data for this study was gathered through the use of Digital Camera, Sketch Books, Pencils and Ink.

Data collection

The information for this work was collected through primary and secondary sources. Ogbule and Okobia (2008) note that, data can be gathered from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are through direct sketches and photographs of frogs taken in their habitat, while the secondary sources are images gathered from books and the internet.

Research Design

This work is an experimental study that is practice based. De Freitas (2007) notes that, Practice-based Research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. She adds that, the term is useful when practice constitutes a critical part of the research methodology resulting in a form of research through practice. Sullivan (2006) also observes that a central feature of art practice is that it embodies ideas that are given form in the process of making artworks. Irrespective of the informing sources, media preferences, or image-base, the artist exercises individual control over the creation and presentation of ideas as forms of knowledge. Here, the artist explores from the representational, exploratory, developmental, geometric and the diffused abstract stage. The images and ideas created have the capacity to not only change the artist's conceptions of reality, but also influence the viewer's interpretation of artworks as well as nature's creatures and their aesthetic potentials.

Sketches

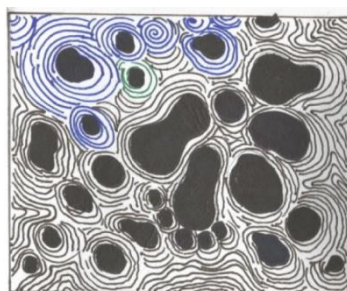
Studies and sketches of different species of frog patterns were created for the effective completion of the studio process. These were produced from observation of pictures: The sketches were also further modified into various desired compositions as realized in fig 3-6.



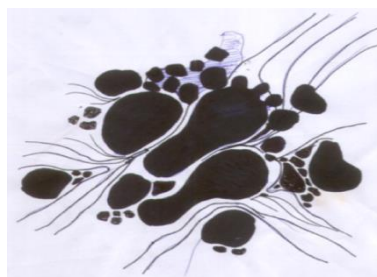
**Figure 3: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk
Poison dart frog
Medium: Ink**



**Figure 4: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk
Observation
Medium: Ink**



**Figure 5: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk
Pattern
Medium: Ink**



**Figure 6: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk
Sketch for Homage II
Medium: Ink**

Photographs

The artist took photographs of frogs from different angles in different locations with the aid of a digital camera (as primary sources) while some other images were sourced from the internet (as secondary sources). See fig 7-8.



Figure 7: Captured Life frog in a container, Photograph by: Zumnan Moses Sekuk



Figure 8: Collection of frogs by the Researcher, Photograph by: Zumnan Moses Sekuk

Place of colour

Colour is one of the most exciting aspects of our environment. It is an element of art that appeals directly to our emotions and is universal in its appreciation. It creates an immediate impact on artists as well as observers. Colour for this study can be classified into two: colours derived from nature and colours not influenced by nature. Colours derived from nature utilized in this study include shades of green, blue, yellow, ochre and brown. Other colours used that were not influenced by nature include Purple, Pink and orange. The author to a great extent employed the use of analogous colours (colours containing blue in their mixtures) to retain a strong feeling of unity. Colour contrast is achieved in this study by placing light and dark pigments side by side.

Analysis of works produced

The paintings for this paper are chronologically grouped according to their characteristics which are from representational, exploration, developmental, geometric to the diffused abstract stage, with themes given for the purposes of recognition.

Representational Stage

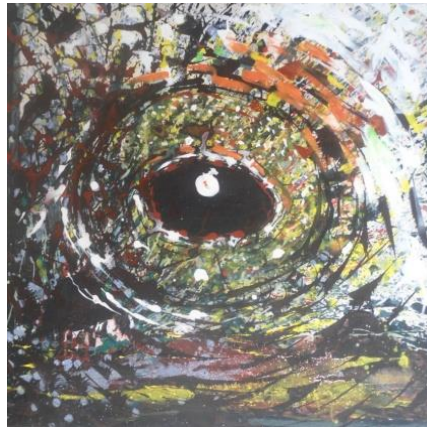
This is the early stage of the study, the artist was able to study and become familiar with frogs and their inherent features. This was also the stage where the artist captured realistically frogs in their various habitats. Subjects for this stage were either painted as individual forms as seen in plate I or as a group as shown in plate II.



**Plate I: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, "Prey Survey", Medium: Oil on canvas, Size: 90x100 cm
Year: 2013**

Exploratory stage

In the exploratory stage, the artist focused on a visual analysis of the frogs from certain views, using acrylic, self-made colours and conventional oil colour. Also the use of painting knife and liquidized paint techniques was introduced. See plate III and IV below.



**Plate IV: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Gaze II, Medium: Mixed Media
Size: 100x100 cm, Year: 2013**



**Plate III: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Gaze, Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 90x100 cm, Year: 2013**

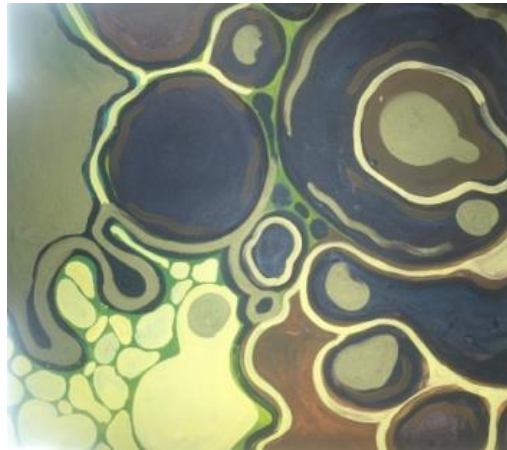
Developmental stage

At the developmental stage, the study reduced the patterns extracted from the selected frogs into planes using colours that are appealing to the artist. Studies at this stage revealed the potentials of the next stage of the research. Also it was observed that certain patterns on the frog tended to have geometric outlook. Broken pattern formation at this stage was used to create compositions that were amoebic in nature. Plate (V and VI) are examples of paintings executed at the developmental stage.



Plate V: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Variety, Medium: Acrylic on canvas

Size: 80x100 cm, Year: 2013



**Plate VI: Artist: Zumnan, Sekuk Homage III, Medium: Acrylic on canvas
Size: (90x100 cm), Year: 2014**

Geometric stage

At this stage, the artist further reduced the patterns to simple rhythmic geometric planes. This stage was inspired by irregular patterns that were derived from the selected frog specie, such as the Leopard Species. The patterns observed in this specie were transformed deliberately into compositions with geometric characters filled with a diverse palette. Plate VII and VIII represent the artist feats in this stage.



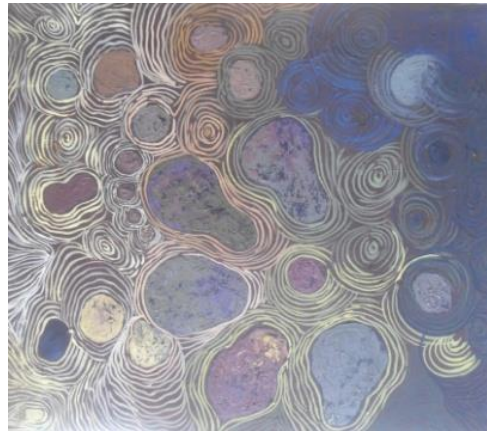
**Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Plate VII: Formation I, Medium: Acrylic on canvas
Size: (80x90 cm), Year: 2014**



**Plate VIII: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Formation II, Medium: Mixed media
Size: (80x90 cm), Year: 2014**

Diffused Abstraction Stage

The works at this final stage show a complete abstraction of identified patterns, suggesting the reappearance of the habitat of the frogs that was characterized by ponds, bubbles and water lily pads. The colour intensity in these paintings are a direct influence of the artist's emotional involvement with the work. The inherent tactile qualities of the frogs habitat has enhanced this particular set of paintings as shown in plate IX and X.



**Plate IX: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Differences, Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 90x100 cm, Year: 2013**



**Plate X: Artist: Zumnan Sekuk, Multiplicity of Contrast, Medium: Oil on canvas
Size: 90x100 cm, Year: 2014**

Summary

The entirety of this paper on painting, explores the use of coloured patterns derived from selected frogs and it reveals that several artists have painted images of various colourful species of frogs but have not given much attention to creating compositions with the patterns and textural qualities evident on such frogs. This author systematically explores with the patterns and textural qualities derived from selected frogs from the representational stage to diffused abstract stage, which broadens one's visual perspective on the aesthetic potentials inferred in nature. This artist adopted the patterns and textural qualities on selected frogs because of their unique form, texture, colour, shape and size. The methodology adopted in this work is practice based which focuses on studio experimental work as a form of research.

Findings

The artist discovered in the course of exploration that when patterns are manipulated with a wide range of colours, interesting and exciting painting compositions could be achieved.

In an attempt to create forms stemming from exploration, using coloured patterns on selected frogs, it was also discovered that certain strong colourful patterns on some frogs, when painted, tend to create an interesting illusionistic textured effect in the compositions, that seem to be visualized as images that command attention, while subtle, muted and closely knit patterns produced aesthetic enrichment and visual interest.

Conclusion

Exploration in painting using the textural qualities of selected species of frogs could be an exciting visual artistic experience. Aside from the aesthetic appreciation of the frog, painters are bound to discover a lot of interesting patterns on the frogs which can be adapted in various ways to create a wide range of expressive artworks. In this paper, exploration was carried out using coloured patterns of selected frogs. Shapes and patterns from frogs were not only explored but manipulated from a representational to a diffused abstract stage. The work also revealed that, through exploration and manipulation, patterns on frogs can be juxtaposed to form compositions of aesthetic values.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the following are recommended for future enhancement in painting. Artists should continue to look at nature as a great source of inspiration because of its inexhaustible potentials.

Further investigation on the pattern of frogs should be carried out with the intention to rediscover more of its compositional and aesthetic qualities.

Coloured patterns on frogs have tactile and illusionistic textural powers that communicate differently to individuals; their study would therefore enrich our concepts of visual perception.

Colour patterns of frogs can be found relevant and suitable for textile design; it is therefore recommended that artist should explore using colour patterns of frogs to come up with aesthetic textile designs.

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