

EXPLORATION OF TIV CULTURAL MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS IN EXPRESSIVE CLAY FORMS

Tser Helen Ngunengen

Department of Industrial Design, Faculty of Environmental Design
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
tserhelen@gmail.com

Alkali, C. Vershima

Department of Industrial Design, Faculty of Environmental Design
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Eric. V. Opoku

Department of Industrial Design, Faculty of Environmental Design
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

And

Lasisi, A. Lamidi

Department of Fine Art, Faculty of Environmental Design
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
lasisilamidi@gmail.com

Introduction

Art practice in the postmodern era questioned the characteristics of art that are based on aesthetics. Conceptual art and other forms of art have been adopted as the post-modernist mode of expression and are seen as a creative experience with emphasis on an idea as a work of art that exists without any visual object other than words. The aesthetics of objects are thus eliminated leaving only the idea or information as conceptual art as opined by (Eze and Ugochukwu, 2014).

Conceptual art is based on the idea behind a particular work and the means of producing it, which is more important than the finished work. Some ceramic artists, who have created works in conceptualized forms, include Jesse Wine (1983), Ron Nagle 21st February 1939, Aaron Arthur Angel born on 7th January 1895 and died on 12th November 1972, Shigekazu Nagae was born in 1953, Abbas Ahuwan was born on 1st December 1947, and Onuzulike Ozoma was born on 17th February 1972. They are among the leading ceramists who brought a rebirth in ceramics by producing conceptual works.

Conceptual Nigerian ceramists such as Yohanna Datiri was born on 1st November 1961 and died on 22nd May 2020, Abbas Ahuwan was born on 1st December 1947, and Onuzulike Ozoma was born on 17th February 1972 have made a considerable impact in the area of ceramics art design on the African continent. The richness of motifs, and symbols available in the Nigerian Culture, and tradition as noted by Kuso (2018) could be a motivating factor for Nigerian ceramist designers to exploit. Despite the developments in ceramic arts, and the attempts made to produce various clay forms, there is still much to be done especially in the adaptation of Tiv cultural motifs, and symbols into ceramic production. The trend of research into clay forms today is assuming a dynamic pace. This has never been so in the past and it is believed that if this trend continues, it may soon be heading for a ceramic pottery revolution considering the abundant natural clay resources available all over the country. According to Ahuwan (1999), there is a constant search for new subject matters and relevant materials that could transformed into tangible products, thus the need to take up research on the abundant locally available raw materials for the production of clay forms.

Conceptualizing Tiv cultural motifs, and symbols in clay forms which is the focus of this study is a process that involves coming up with new ideas. This research is intended to fill the gap in conceptual ceramics in Tivland. Conceptualism is a style of art that places more value on the artist's idea rather than the visual aesthetics of an artwork. Janson and Janson (2006) affirm that conceptualists are more concerned with the concept or idea behind an artwork rather than its visual aesthetics. Yadawei (2016) states that Conceptual art consists of rethinking and researching the history of art, aesthetics, sociology of art, psychology of art, philosophy of art, ontology of art and criticism of art. All these can also be inspired by the individual character, sensibility and thoughts of an artist visualized in the form of an art object.

A Brief Historical Background of the Tiv People

Mhii u Tiv (The Origin of Tiv)

The Tiv people believe that they are the descendants of a man by the name of Tiv, who is their ancestor. Oral tradition states that the man Tiv in the company of his wife Aliwe and two sons Ipusu and Ichongo, left his relations and settled at Swem; a mountainous terrain of the central section of the Nigeria and Cameroun border. The Swem serves as the ancestral homeland of the Tiv people some scholars like Alkali, (2009) and Ndera (2013) are of the view that the place where Swem could be located cannot be revealed or visited by any person because it is a sacred place for selected reputable elders. It is affirmed by tradition that Tiv migrated from Swem to their present abode in the Benue Valley. Oral tradition recorded that at the time Tiv, his wife and two sons were on their way to the present abode of the Tiv people, they came across a river and were assisted by a big snake called (Ikarem) to crossover to continue with their journey. Chia (2008) asserts that the snake became the Tiv's friend and as such it was never killed by the Tiv.

Available literature relating to the development, that saw the appointment of a Tiv paramount ruler is linked to the visit embarked upon to Gboko in 1944, by Sir Arthur Richards, the then Governor General of Nigeria. It was at the time of the visit that, Sir Arthur Richards was confronted with the request by the established patriarchs and clan heads to be appointed as Beagh u Tiv, to which he agreed on the condition that the person selected would be acceptable to all the Tiv people. The Beagh u Tiv, as noted by Ndera (2013) is the chief of all the Tiv people irrespective of where they reside in any part of the world. He lives in Gboko which is the traditional headquarters and is the chief custodian of Tiv cultural heritage. The Beagh u Tiv, is also answerable to the Governor of Benue State on all matters relating to traditional laws and customs in Tiv land.

The costume worn by the Beagh u Tiv is Anger a traditionally hand-woven cloth, using black and white yarns derived from cotton wool. The black and white colours utilized create beautiful features that make the cloth appear like zebra skin. It is linked with a cultural source as Anger u Tiv. Traditionally, Anger is normally used in the decoration of illustrious Sons and Daughters of the Tiv. It is also worn by Tiv elders or Chiefs during traditional council meetings usually held in Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. Attached to the Beagh u Tiv attire is an image of a carved Tiger head that symbolized authority, and peace.

Production of Works

The production methods utilized for the execution of Conceptual Ceramic Works are the Pinching Method, Throwing Method, Coiling Method and Slab Method as shown in Plates I to VII:



Plate I: Pinching Method in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 2022,
Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022



Plate II: Scooping of Works in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
2022, Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022



Plate III: Centering Clay on the Wheel in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 2022, Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022



Plate IV: Pulling Clay on the Wheel in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 2022, Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022



Plate V: Throwing Method in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 2022, Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022



Plate VI: Coiling Method in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 2022, Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022



Plate VII: Slab Method in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 2022, Photograph by Oluokun Seun Samson 2022

Analysis of Selected Artworks

A survey into contemporary ceramic practices in Nigeria revealed that the art of ceramics has delved into installation art, as exhibited in the works of artists like Chris Echeta titled "Sacking of a General" a terra cotta work with enrobe designs, metal/wire and plastic. The metaphorical images draw attention to the artist and his works as well as the social relevance of his works. Onuzilike's works also in this direction are produced in the use of mixed media and interrogate issues of armed conflicts, political violence and human vulnerability. He is seen as an artist that fails to fizzle out, rather, he continues to search for new idioms dialoguing with life. The artist's philosophy as asserted by Okpe (2001) is the dehumanization of the human being through global events of armed conflict, genocide, natural disasters and so on.

The ceramic works produced to an extent are influenced by the environment. As such, the artistic expressions are direct reflections of the researchers' environmental experiences. Also, the ceramics works produced under cultural themes that, seek to directly or indirectly address contemporary issues that have cultural relevance. For example, the use of reptiles and amphibians in the pot series are works that depict the intricate relationships between human beings and their decision-making

process. The ceramics work produced is classified under four groups as follows; 1. Works created on pot surfaces; 2. The tree back motif design, 3. The Tiv masks and 4, the installations.

Mhii u Tiv (The Origin of Tiv)

The composition titled Mhii u Tiv (The Origin of Tiv) in Plate VIII IX to X portrays Tiv, his wife Aliwe and two sons Ipusu, Ichongo on the back of a snake Ikarem crossing the big river Swem. The river flow is achieved in this particular composition through the use of moving lines.



Plate VIII: Mhii u Tiv (The Origin of Tiv) Front view Height (29x25cm)
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate IX: Mhii u Tiv (The Origin of Tiv) Back view Height (29x25cm)
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate X: Mhii u Tiv (The Origin of Tiv) Sides view Height (29x25cm)
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023

Beagh u Tiv (The Symbol of His Royal Highness)

Beagh u Tiv (The Symbol of His Royal Highness) is represented using three things that make up the surface quality of the work. These are pictorial design, motif design and symbol. The surface pot is adorned with the image of the head of a Tiger that, symbolizes the Beagh u Tiv as shown in Plates XI to XIII.



Plate XI: Beagh u Tiv (The Symbol of His Royal Highness) Front view, Height (37x30cm)
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate XII: Beagh u Tiv (The Symbol of His Royal Highness) Back view
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate XIII: Beagh u Tiv (The Symbol of His Royal Highness) Sides view
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023

Ya u Tiv (The Tiv Settlement)

Ya u Tiv (The Tiv Settlement) is made up of a limited number of huts. The huts include sleeping huts, ate, kitchen, and storing the scratched surface motifs design is utilized on the roof surface by scratching the entire surface as shown in the works Plates XIV to XVI.



Plate XIV: Ya u Tiv (Symbol of the Tiv Settlement) Front view
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate XV: Ya u Tiv (Symbol of the Tiv Settlement) Back view
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate XVI: Ya u Tiv (Symbol of the Tiv Settlement sides view)
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023

Kem u Kwase u Tiv (Symbol of Tiv Marriage)

Marriage among the Tiv people is by exchange. The method involved in getting a wife is by giving one's sister to the girl's brother. The snail is embellished with a lizard motif, suggesting the challenges that are faced by couples, see Plates XVI to XIX.



Plate XVII: Kem u Kwase u Tiv (Symbol of Tiv Marriage) Front view, Height (50x30cm) 2023
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate XVIII: Kem u Kwase u Tiv (Symbol of Tiv Marriage) back view in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria height (50x30cm) 2023
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023



Plate XIX: Kem u Kwase u Tiv (Symbol of Tiv Marriage) sides view in the Ceramic Section, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria height (50x30cm) 2023
Photograph by Helen Tser 2023

Conclusion

This mode of ceramic practice from exponents of conceptual ceramics helped in developing art practice to a large extent in Nigeria, by establishing a unique way of developing conceptual ceramics. This development introduced a high level of intellectual content in the artists' works. Conceptual ceramics are seen as works that bear subject matters that can spur discussions or investigation and can be a pedagogical tool that can promote learning in some related fields.

It is observed that such works are rich with intellectual content and are not simply commercial ceramics for utilitarian use. Ceramics should not just be a mere household item, rather, through conceptualizing ceramics; ceramics itself will become a vehicle for learning and studying man and

his environment. It is an educational asset that can provide clues to fields such as Anthropology, Archaeology and Politic, and has become a means of expression and communication.

References

- Ahuwan A. M. (1999). Determination of Physical Properties of Clay Samples in Bauchi State Suspected to be Kaolin, *Journal of Environmental Studies Faculty of Environmental Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria* Vol. 1 No. 1 pp. 29 – 35.
- Alkali, C. V (2008) The Evolution of Practice of "Non-pot", *Ceramics in Nigeria. Its Merit and Demerits in Ashakwu, Journal of Ceramics*, Vol -6 June pp19-22.
- Chia, R.T. (2008). *Tiv Warfare Methods and Weapons an Ethno Archaeological Study* Unpublished Dissertation, Department of Archaeology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria. July17. 2021, p 20.
- Eze, N. and Ugochukwu, E. K., (2014) *Art, Craft Commodity and Creative Economy in Contemporary Society*, Ashakwu, *Journal of Ceramics*, Vol -11 Special Edition Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria pp 60 - 61.
- Jason, H. and Jason, A. (2006) *A Basic History of Western Art*. 7th Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey. p, 608
- Kuso, S, S.B. (2018). *Adaptation of Nigerian Handcraft Woven and Printed Fabrics for Apparel Production and Fashion Appreciation*. Unpublished M.A Dissertation, Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria – Nigeria. pp 7- 8
- Ndera, J.O. (2013) *Wombo Makar Historical Reflections on Chieftaincy and Colonial Experience in Tiv Land*. Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press pp 7-10
- Okpe, T. (2001) *Interrogating The Human Figure in Bridging the Ceramic Sculpture Divide: Practice in Nigeria*, *Interpreting Ceramics, Issues*. Retrieved from [https // www.Interpreting- ceramics/com/ issue 008/ articles /18 html](https://www.Interpreting-ceramics.com/issue_008/articles/18.html). Retrieved May, 15, 2019.
- Yadawei (2016) *Conceptual Ceramics*. Retrieved from <https://www.yadawei.net/single-post/2016/09/27/Conceptual-Ceramics-or-Functional-PotteryConceptualism> July17. 2021