

**TAPESTRY DESIGNS: A FOCUS ON MARY DALYOP ZANG'S SELECTED WORKS****JAJI, Muyideen Adio/ ZANG, Mary Dalyop**Department of Fine Arts/ Department of Industrial Design,  
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African artist inspired by European education and modern expression of art defied traditional methods of expression in art. Rather than copy, they employed a modern realistic, method of expression to their depictions of Nigerian landscapes in the process of achieving their dreams of representation as well as capturing and documenting such scenic landscapes. Many of these un-sung artists exist in several art ventures using different media of expressions. An example is Mary Dalyop- Zang, whose works in tapestry speak volumes about her locality's undulating rocky terrain. A peep into her development will encourage other burgeoning artists to step up and give good account of themselves in their various fields of endeavor. Mary's tapestry technique of production is the main focus of this article.

**Key Words: Tapestry, Designs, Selected works, Mary Dalyop Zang****Introduction**

The Textile Arts Section of the Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria has contributed immensely to the production of both professional and academic textile artists in Nigeria. Many of whom are lecturing in different universities, producing their types all over the country. A few have set up private studios in different parts of the country, while some are employed by textile industries. Over the years, there has been consistent lack of interest in the production and exhibition of colourful tapestry as elucidated by the students' yearly exhibitions in recent times. Works in tapestry were either few or nonexistent in some stands and where they existed, they were small, undefined and shabbily executed and presented. When asked why, they complain of its time consuming nature.

Their expertise in other weaving activities like rugs, mats, basket weaving, tie-dye, batik and prints is most revealing. These are exhibited with pride and great attachment to the products in different decorations and designs. One then wonders why it is not the same with tapestry. Tapestry is not a new technique in weaving neither does it engage the use of new materials. It is more of painting with thread using the weaving technique. It is an intricate interlacing of threads with different values.

In the Department of Industrial Design during the 2015/2016 academic session, a Master's student dared this and came out with impressive designs that attracted the attention of several people in the university. When asked why she ventured into an area that seems to have been abandoned for a very long time, she was fast to respond by saying that it was due to lack of interest and innovation observed over the years of her training in the department that motivated her to venture into the production of a variety of woven landscapes with notable innovation for embellishing the interior. She is of the view that tapestry can as well be used to embellish public and private spaces such as government parastatals, hospitals, libraries, municipalities, corporations, institutions, theatres, banks and residences.

Through her tapered works she was able to prove that there is no controversy over the relative merit and aesthetic status of works in tapestry as opposed to other weaving techniques. She produced interesting landscape compositions of famous rock formations in Plateau State, which includes Riyom rocks and its environment in tapestry. This paper looks at the artist's life, works and style of execution for the benefit of knowledge and humanity.

**Concept of Tapestry**

According to Zang (2016), tapestry is a technique of weaving that combines the interlacing and interlocking techniques to produce various forms of designs on items such as cushion covers, rugs, backdrops, bags, caps, belts, shoes, cloths and so on. It involves the weft coming from opposite direction of the warp and turning around adjacent warps leaving an open space. Campbell (2000) technically sees it as figurative weft-faced textile woven by hand on a loom. Historically, it is not a new technique in weaving. The Egyptians are said to have used it between 1483 and 1411BCE as evident by its fragments found in the tomb of Thutmose IV and Tutankhamen. It is said to have also been practiced in China before it began in Europe (The Victorian Tapestry Workshop, 2007).

Tapestry designs cannot be produced without the designer having basic knowledge in drawing, painting and weaving in order to develop and stimulate patterns to be artistically expressed, bearing in mind the basic elements and principles of design.

### Techniques and Materials for Production

Tapestry varies in many ways and there are materials and different approaches in its production. It also differs from culture to culture.

Techniques in tapestry include:

- \* **Interlacing** – the weaving of two or more things together often in a pattern
- \* **Interlocking** – interweaving by connecting two or more ends together to form a pattern
- \* **Needlepoint** – hand embroidery done with thick coloured threads on canvas
- \* **Applique** – stitching pieces of cloth on a large canvas or plain cloth
- \* **Fingernail** – the weavers working the weft with their fingernails
- \* **Eccentric** – adding fanciful and imaginative ways to enhance patterns.

Convey (2015) opines that, the techniques used by textiles artist vary; they weave, crochet, knot, twine, braid, knit, spin, stitch as well as print, tie and dye. Tapestry is a method of creating pictorial designs by interlacing two sets of yarn threads called warp and weft. The warp threads form the base for the entire weaving, that is arranged parallel to one another and is held in equal tension on the loom. Tension is created by pulling the warp-ends so tight that, the design becomes taut without shrinkage. The weft can be single or double or more so that they can pass over and under the warp stripes in a systematic manner thereby creating a solid piece of design. A hand-woven appearance is achieved due to the weft shuttles being inserted by hand which gives rise to variable tension needed.

### Processes of Producing Handmade Tapestry

Production of handmade tapestry is a labor-intensive process requiring the designer to engage in critical observation, making working drawings of different pictorial views, study colour theory, and the interpretation of colours in the execution of large projects to be framed for use as decorative designs. A large tapestry is easily manipulated due to enough working space which helps in getting the right proportion. Weaving of smaller designs is difficult to achieve because of space and how to deal with the rigidity of the motifs to be laid on the vertical warps (Zang, 2016).

Tapestry differs from other forms of weaving because it has no definite patterns and involves a lot of time in the observation, preparation and selection of yarns for the production of images from the working drawings, swatches and photographs. Kparevzua (1983) opines that the simplest technique involves warps stripes which are set up during the process of warping up the loom. In this study, the warp stripes were used to form the base for the design and to achieve equal tension for good patterns in order to avoid having loose weft threads in the process of weaving. Discontinuous wefts are used in order to create pictorial designs that are deliberately copied by the designer (See Figure 1).



**Fig. 1, The path and the steps in discontinuous weaving (interlocking) by Zang, 2014, Medium: Synthetic wool on loom, Source: Studio work by Zang**

The production of tapestry design is such that the wefts are more than the warps, or vertical strands, which are not visible in the finished design. The horizontal threads (wefts) are manipulated over the vertical strands (warps) covering them by copying the cartoon to form the woven patterns desired.

Practical Encyclopedia of Crafts (1973) states that, "after forming of taut threads called the warp, the weaver goes over and under the warp threads at right angles with threads known as the weft. "Similarly, in plain cloth weaving, the wefts pass over and under alternate warps strands with each passage just as in tapestry weaving. The number of the weft determines the thickness of the woven fabric as produced in this study. "In most pattern weavings, the loom is first strung with warps strands, and then the pattern is woven in with weft threads carried on a needle". An example is shown below.



*Fig. 2, weaving with weft threads and needle, Zang, 2014, Title: Riyom rocks (weaving) 2014, Medium: Wool on loom, Source: Studio work by Zang*

Designs can be produced either from direct interpretation or from inspiration. Jones, (1977) opines that, "There is so much to learn from the past, in design, in accomplishment, but most of all in the fact that it used to be considered necessary to provide the untrained designer with well devised and well-constructed patterns" The designer needs to be guided by certain principles in order to accomplish his or her goal. Jones' opinion is that, "True tapestry is woven on a loom, a woolen weft on linen or woolen warp" This study discusses the production of tapestry using synthetic wool as weft and twine as warp on a loom in a variety of landscape designs.

#### **Mary Dalyop Zang's Background and Educational Development**

Mary hails from Jos metropolis in Plateau state of Nigeria. She is from the tribe called Berom. The father was a clergyman and the mother was a traditional cloth weaver. Like every humble home with regard for education then, they put their daughter Mary in the Local Education Authority Primary School, Gyel. Her mother, being a literate weaver with drawing ability, used her knowledge to illustrate with diagrams some biblical stories for members of her church when Mary was growing up. This rubbed off on little Mary, and by eight years old, she was assisting senior classes in drawing maps on the blackboards. A scenario that found her placed on desks or tables at times in front of the class for her hand to reach the board.

On completing her secondary education in Government Teacher's College, Amper, she picked-up an appointment with the Roman Catholic Missionary Primary School, Gyel. After teaching for a year, she proceeded to Ahmadu Bello University Zaria for a Diploma in Fine Arts. This dream of having a tertiary education was truncated by marriage in 1985 and consistently suppressed until 2003 when she gained admission into the Fine and Applied Arts Department of the College of Education, Gindiri.

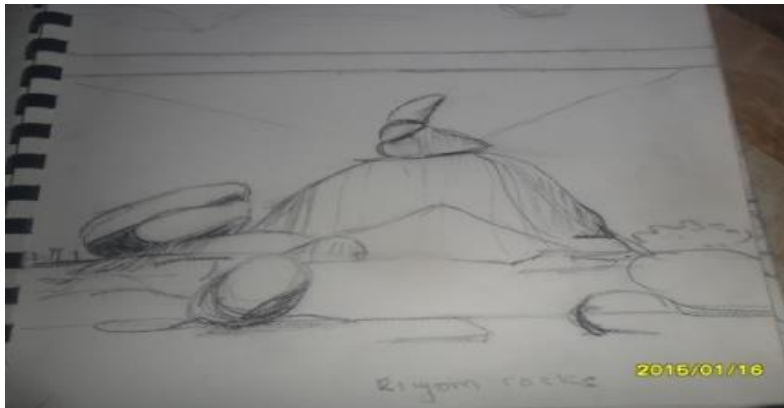
In 2008, with the zeal to prove to the doubting Thomas of her ability to excel in the arts, she honored the admission into the Industrial Design Department of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where she obtained her first degree in Industrial Design (textile option). With the same aggression and the desire to fulfill her dreams, she followed it up with a master's degree in the same field. She is currently concluding a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Industrial Design, specialising in Textile Design.

She holds several part-time teaching positions in the College of Education, Gindiri, the Department of Industrial, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and at the University of Jos. She is a prolific draftsman, an accomplished textile designer, book illustrator and a painter. She is married with three children.

#### **Mary Zang's Method of Handcrafted Tapestry Technique**

After constructing a rectangular loom of wooden frame, consisting of nails arranged with equal spaces between them at both the top and bottom of the frame, Mary employs the use of industrially spun threads and twine as the principal material for producing handcrafted tapestry. Other materials used include: synthetic yarn of different colours and tools such as tapestry needles (big), small, needles, scissors, masking tape, marker pens, pencils and colour pencils.

Mary produces sketches of what she intends to design before embarking on weaving. According to her, a design may be produced from imagination or direct interpretation or from inspiration. She uses marker pens for inking on the warp and swatches that were produced with colour pencils or charcoal. (See figure 3)



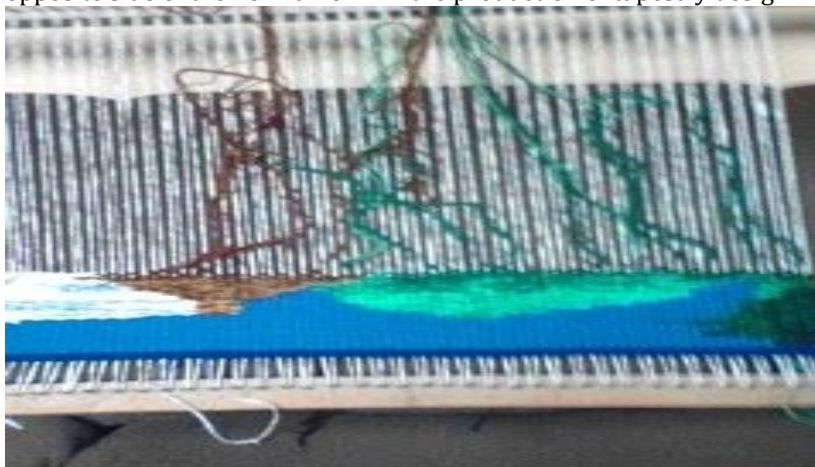
**Fig 3. Charcoal sketch on cardboard by Zang, 2014, Title: Riyom rocks (sketch) 20 14, Medium: Charcoal on cardboard, Source: Studio work by Zang**

She constructs the warp by running twine up and down hooking the nails arranged on the loom. The application of tapestry needles for designs begins with the selvage which Mary refers to as the beginning of weaving after warping of the twine on the loom. She employs continuous weaving approach that is often referred to as interlacing technique. She uses small needles at times in the rendition of delicate and intricate parts of the designs with several weft threads in the weaving process, looping the weft to achieve pigment variation in the pictorial composition instead of knotting.



**Fig 4. Interlocking the wefts with tapestry needle to achieve the overlapped rocks, Title: Riyom rocks, Medium: Wool on loom, Source: Studio work by Zang (2014)**

Sometimes, she uses a repeat design where she starts weaving from the reverse side, showing the opposite side of the normal form in the production of tapestry design.



**Fig 5. Showing the early stage of woven patterns from the reversed design, Title: Reflection (imagination) 2015, Medium: Wool on loom, Source: Studio work by researcher**

She starts her finishing by trimming and tying of all the warp strands carefully and also measures the finished design for framing according to the sizes of the projects. The introduction of glass in her frames has added another dimension to the finishing of the tapestry designs. She uses materials like fibre, frames, glass, evostic gum, screws, nails, straw board, ceiling board, masking tape and brown paper.



In the exposition of her works on tapestry of the undulating and jaggy, stony terrain of Jos in 2016 at the Fine Arts Department Zaria, she proved to be an exponent of the minimalists. Her draftsmanship was handy in her designs; her painterly experience was not left out in the rendition of the works exhibited in her solo-exhibition. Using her virtuosity in painting and drawing, she created incredibly detailed compositions of landscapes of her locality. Two examples of such compositions are found in figures 6 and 7 showing Riyom Rocks and Sun Set compositions when completed.



**Fig 6. Riyom rocks by Zang M. D.; 120cm x 90cm; Tapestry 2014.**

Riyom rocks are located in Riyom, along Abuja road 25km away from Jos, the Plateau State capital. The green plains surrounding the rocks are achieved with a variation of green threads on the foreground; this creates a contrast with the rocks and further enhanced the beauty of the landscape formation. The rock formations are also achieved through a skillful interlacing and interlocking of various shades of brown thus creating the illusion of depth and solidity. The clear blue sky is achieved in a minimalists' style with single shades of white and light blue in an uneven pattern that mimics cloud formations on a clear day. This enhances the clarity and identity of each object within the composition and alludes also the artist's skill and dexterity with the needle and thread. Aesthetics is achieved by the neatness and precise nature of achieving and representing the landscape.



**Fig 7. Sunset by Zang M. D.; 67cm x 36cm; Tapestry (2014)**

The Sun Set composition was inspired by the setting of the sun and rendered in bright and dark hues as observed by the artist. The composition combines orange, yellow and shades of brown wool to achieve the wave of patterns. The work is inspired by the dry seasons, as evidenced by the predominant use of earth tones depicted in varying values of brown and yellow ochres. The composition reveals the gradual gradation of the setting sun in dry season. The left side of the composition is occupied by a variety of tints and tones, which creates a perspective effect on the design, making it suitable for interior embellishment. The composition seeks to highlight the unique skyline of the dry season where the sky seemingly meets with earth's surface.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding discussions, revealed that Mary is one of the numerous unsung accomplished textile artists in Nigeria who has a flair for tapestry. For daring into an area that is said to be cumbersome and time

consuming, one can conclude that she is a hardworking lady inspired to create composition with hanging rocks, brilliant sunsets and reflections in the river watching all dissolved into each other as she progresses in her weaving. She uses brilliant colours in her works and often combines minimalists' style with impressionism in rendering her scenes. Her works, although colourful, are made up of forms which exist in a quiet, timeless light rather than in the glancing sunlight of normal painting. In her words, "she focuses on creating a peaceful quiet and comfortable natural environment that is devoid of noise and violence for people to appreciate nature". She models her masses with a series of weft threads to reveal solidity in her composition and also to make the work faster, heavier and with more textures.

She is a teacher par-excellence, whose interest in disseminating knowledge is high. She is a very good influence, capable of rubbing her positive influence on students and the society at large. The students of industrial Design Department in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, are presently benefiting from her expertise in textile design through a part-time teaching arrangement which may elude them if they are not fast in absorbing her as a permanent staff before she completes her Doctor of Philosophy.

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