

THE FRUIT AND THE SPIRITUAL: AN APPRAISAL OF 'PRAISE'

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Abstract

The importance of the spiritual aspect of humanity is what informed the focus of this paper. The paper extends an already broached subject of; an artistic contemplation of the Watermelon fruit in Painting. The background looks at the place of spirituality in painting from the cave to the contemporary era. This paper problematizes the spiritual discourse in a rare genre of still life painting of the watermelon fruit in painting. It aimed at appraising the painting titled; *Praise*, and considered the different perspectives by which worshippers have exhibited propriety and the perverse on religious platforms. Through a studio methodology, that benefited from the surrealistic principle of dream, also used microscope in the lab to view the interior of the fruit, *Praise* was created and appraised using the qualitative approach. In conclusion, *Praise*; springs out of the contemplation of the watermelon to bear artistic witness to the contemporary behavior of the Christian worshipper. It harnesses the aesthetic beauty of the watermelon form and creates a discourse by exposing both the good and the perverse on the religious platform.

Keywords: Spiritual, Watermelon, Painting, Dream, Praise

Introduction and Background

The watermelon is a fruit with ancient root, which are traceable to Egypt through the Christian Holy Bible; “we remember the fish, we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons ...” Numbers: 11:5, in (Gyegwe 2017). The basic appearance of the fruit is that of a green exterior colour and reddish interior. In an already contemplated terrain through painting, the fruit is a combination of various hidden elements of humanity which are only visible through a close-up contemplation. My artistic adventure into the interior of the fruit in (Gyegwe 2008) is a revelation of the obscured political, social and spiritual configurations of life. The spiritual in this paper interrogates intersections between the mind, soul, spirit and the higher configurations of life in opposition to the material temporalities. Praise in context is the connection between the creature and the creator in an elevated realm of thanks and appreciation or admiration.

The subject of fruits in painting has been the focus of artists over time, however their attention on the superficial aspects of the subject was a gap. This paper presents an interior probe of the watermelon fruit, which revealed several themes in painting; of which the spiritual is the focus of analysis. The relationship between artists and the spiritual are numerously expressed in painting. For example; the artistic drawings and paintings on cave walls have spiritual connotations. (Moffat 2007) notes that; “Like we do, prehistoric people often represented their world and beliefs through visual images. Art emerged with the appearance and dispersion of Homo sapiens from Africa, Europe, Asia, Australasia, and the Americas. Paintings, sculptures, engravings and later pottery reveal not only a quest for beauty but also complex social systems and spiritual concepts”. (Clottes 1998) also corroborates that:

In the course of the past few years, though, a new attempt, spurred by David Lewis-Williams, was made in order to discover an interpretative framework. Shamanism was proposed ([Clottes & Lewis-Williams](#) 1998). Considering the fact that shamanism is so widespread among hunter-gatherers and that Upper Paleolithic people were admittedly hunter-gatherers, looking to shamanism as a likely religion for them should have been the first logical step whenever the question of meaning arose.

Away from the prehistoric period to more organized religious setting, (Kleiner 2010), records the tensions between Catholics and Protestants “who took seriously the role of devotional imagery in religious life. However, their views differed dramatically. Whereas Catholics deemed art as valuable for cultivating piety, Protestants believed visual imagery could produce idolatry and could distract the faithful from their goal-developing a personal relationship with God”. It is against such background that there is a proliferation of art in the church, especially the Catholic Church which was the greatest patron of artists in the renaissance period and beyond. For example of great artists like Michelangelo Bounarotti’s Sistine chapel ceiling painting where he tells the story of humanity from the creation of Adam to the prophets, was commissioned by Pope Julius II. Several other examples have been stated by Kleiner. Similarly, (Stockstad 2005) has records of religious art by Melchior Broederlam’s *Annunciation and Visitation* which Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper*. in Nigeria, the presence of art in the church is corroborated by (Jari 2007) research on iconography in the Catholic Churches in Plateau State. The research highlights their presence, functions, and documents their patrons and their creators.

The spiritual dimension

On the spiritual side, the benefits of a fruit diet are worth the indulgence. According to the Holy Bible; Genesis 1: 29-30, in God’s initial design, man is not a natural flesh eater, so He told the first human beings: “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed: to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so,” Since man or animal is not a natural flesh eater, to be so is to violate the divine pattern. In the Holy Bible, the psalmist affirmed this dietary regimen when he wrote: “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth.” Psalm: 104:14. From the foregoing, we can gather that diet is one of the most crucial aspects of the spiritual aspirant’s regimen, according to the atmajyoti.org website; “it will determine the quality and effectiveness of his meditation experience.” The website further illustrates that: “just as soft wet wax readily takes the impression of a print and retains it- in contrast to cold hard wax-so the mind formed of light and pure food energies like fruits will respond most readily and permanently to vibrations and impressions produced by meditation”.

Fruit consumption by man, then, can be a major determinant of man's success or failure in spiritual living. Other spiritual benefits to be derived from the eating of fruits include; higher perception, healthy body figure that reflects the kind of food we eat, this would help in spiritual exercises like dancing to God in praise and worship, yoga, to mention a few. Fruits can also help in developing a higher consciousness; this is because diet is a crucial aspect of emotional, intellectual and spiritual development. For diet and consciousness, are interrelated, and a purity of diet, is an effective aid to purity and clarity of consciousness; "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God". Mathew 5:8. In Nigeria, the fruit is an indispensable cuisine at Ramadan (the Muslim fasting period). They are eaten as a delicacy all over Nigeria.

Ever since the first man, Adam, according to the Holy Bible and Holy Koran, lost the "Garden of Eden" through a fruit; his descendants have been on a quest to regain what was lost. It is in the light of that loss that my creative quest seeks to gain insight into the spiritual cum aesthetic dimensions of the watermelon fruit.

In conclusion, the consumption of fruits by man would give room for an effective meditation experience. It also means giving good sense a chance to prove itself, since there is nothing but benefit to be gained

Source of Inspiration

Two dreams in February 2005 triggered off the interest in the subject. Preparing the mind towards this research led the researcher into continuous thinking about the watermelon even in buses while traveling. These thoughts manifested in dreams which led to deeper thoughts on this subject. Creativity itself is a result of contemplation. In the first dream, the watermelon was seen in the middle of a tarred road, split open, exposing the reddish interior with black seeds and green rind against the black tar. The memories from this particular dream were recorded in a gouache painting: Dream I. In Dream II, there was an oval shape of the melon reminiscent of the earth from outer space with a Catholic Rosary over it. The background was a dark and greenish infinity. Dream II was painted between 2:00am to 4:00am with acrylic, after the researcher woke from sleep the same night on 16 February, 2005.



Figure 1 (Dream I) 2005



Figure 2 (Dream II) 2005

Data Contemplations/Sketches

Data was gathered through contemplative exercises⁷, this involves thinking deeply on the watermelon. However, the import from that exercise was expressed through sketches and study drawings from close up observations. Smashed, decomposed, sliced and partly eaten watermelon fruits were undertaken.

“Still life with watermelon” (Plate I) captures an arrangement of banana, orange and tomatoes alongside three whole watermelon fruits. In the background, a half cut watermelon fruit exposes the reddish interior of the fruit superficially. The fruits are set against a background of a tree bark which is realized in gray. The watermelon as a fruit and delicacy, is not sold in isolation, this informs why it is painted here with other fruits in an arrangement traditionally associated with still life painting. The painting presents the familiar visual appreciation of the painting of fruits without the interior attention which is sought in this research. In a way, it is preamble to the interior investigation which creates the rare interior character of the fruit which is presented in the painting titled ‘Praise’, in plate II.



Plate I, Artist: Gabriel Gyegwe, Title: Still life With Melon- 2005, Medium: Oil on Canvas. 51x 37 cm
Source: Researcher

“Praise”, is dominated by an abstract figure in red and a white head inspired by the seed. The hands are outstretched in a pose of praise to his creator. The painting is rendered in oil on canvas with repetitive line flow. The white head draws attention and creates contrast with the dominant green. The inspiration comes from a close-up on the interior of the fruit and captures the spiritual expressions of the interior of the watermelon fruit, which draws comparison with the common-sights in churches during worship sessions when some worshippers throw their hands up to heaven in a moment of thanksgiving, supplication and

spiritual gyration. The linear formations of various shades and tints of green is suggestive of the flamboyance of the flowing garment which is reminiscent of the material mindset of some religious worshippers. Such materialism has consequently shifted focus on true spiritual regimen to deceptions and mere religion, and by extension engendering societal decadence and corruption as some people would go to extremes to belong to a class, even in the church.



Plate II, Artist: Gabriel Gyegwe, Title: Praise- 2005, Medium: Oil on Canvas. 137x 106 cm, Source: Researcher Conclusion

In concluding, this paper explored the intersection between art and technology as an aspect of modern perspective in painting. This is through the already broached study that used the microscope as a tool to probe the interior of the fruit and thereby revealing the unseen and unknown physiology of the fruit. The result of the internal probing is the abstract linear forms used to interpret the spiritual dimension of the watermelon fruit. The spiritual has been explored by different artists from primordial times beginning from the cave drawings and Painting, through successive stylistic periods like the Byzantine, Roman, renaissance to the contemporary averred by different authorities.

Praise; springs out of the contemplation of the watermelon to bear artistic witness to the contemporary behavior of the Christian worshipper. It harnesses the aesthetic beauty of the watermelon form and creates a discourse by exposing both the good and the perverse in some worshippers.

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