

TEXTILE INSTALLATIONS IN NATIONAL MUSEUMS: EXAMINING CURATORIAL PRACTICE IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This paper is designed to explore curatorial practices around textile installations in national museum in Rivers State. It aims to show the importance of textile art as a form of cultural expression and looks at the challenges curators face in preserving and displaying these artworks. Textile art reflects the culture, heritage, and identity of the people, but curators must find a way to balance tradition with modern ideas to engage today's audiences. This task involves ensuring that the exhibitions remain true to their cultural roots while still being appealing to a diverse range of visitors. The findings indicate that striking this balance is crucial for maintaining the relevance of textile art in modern museum settings, enabling people to more effectively connect with the cultural stories behind the art. The study concludes that utilizing creative display techniques, such as improved lighting and more thoughtful layouts, is crucial for making exhibitions more engaging and effectively highlighting the cultural value of the textile works. Additionally, involving local communities, artisans, and cultural leaders is crucial to helping visitors appreciate the deeper meaning of the art, ensuring that exhibitions remain significant for both local and international audiences. The paper also recommends on-going training for curators to equip them with the skills needed to face these challenges. Moreover, adding interactive features to exhibitions, such as hands-on activities, is suggested to improve visitor

experiences and keep textile art relevant in today's museums.

Keywords: Curatorial, Textile, Exhibitions, Museum and Expression

Introduction

Textile artworks in the national museum hold a special place within the cultural narrative of Rivers State, representing centuries of craftsmanship, tradition, and artistic innovation. These textiles are more than just functional objects; they serve as powerful symbols of identity, history, and social values. The national Museum in Rivers State now recognises the profound significance of these textile creations by incorporating them into carefully curated exhibitions. The integration of textile art into the museum space reflects an evolving appreciation for these works, not merely as artefacts of the past but as dynamic expressions of culture with relevance in the contemporary world.

Curatorial practice plays a pivotal role in this transformation. In examining textile installations in the national museum within Rivers State, it becomes clear that curators must navigate a complex balance between preserving the traditional essence of these works and introducing modern techniques that engage today's audiences. As Eze (2023) notes, textile art installations offer a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of heritage and modernity, with curators acting as the bridge between the two. Through thoughtful presentation, curation is not just about display; it becomes an act of storytelling, inviting viewers to connect with the textiles on a deeper, more meaningful level.

The Role of Curators in Textile Installations

A curator is a professional responsible for the acquisition, care, and display of objects in a museum or gallery, ensuring that items of cultural, historical, or artistic significance are preserved and presented in a way that educates and engages the public. Curators play a key role in researching collections, designing exhibitions, and contributing to the understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage. According to the National Museum Service, a curator is "charged with the preservation of collections and the management of their relevance to public knowledge" (National Museum Service, 2020).

Curators play a vital role in bringing textile art to life within museums, particularly in Rivers State, where textiles are rich with cultural meaning and history. Their responsibilities extend far beyond simply displaying these works. Curators act as storytellers, connecting the audience to the cultural heritage embedded in the textiles.



Plate 1

Name: National Museum Service
Title: Responsibilities
Source: Igwe, Edith Adaku
Year: 2024



Plate 2
 Name: National Museum Service
 Source: Igwe, Edith Adaku
 Title: Knowledge
 Year: 2024

Omojola (2021), emphasizes that the role of a curator has transformed significantly from being a mere overseer of collections to an active educator. Curators are now responsible for designing exhibitions that not only showcase textiles but also engage audiences in understanding the cultural, historical, and social contexts behind the pieces. Through careful curation, they create narratives that invite the public to delve into the symbolism, craftsmanship, and significance of the textiles. This educational aspect requires curators to contextualize the textiles, presenting them as artifacts that convey stories, traditions, and identities, thereby enriching the viewer’s experience and knowledge.



Plate 3

Name: National Museum Service
Title: Educational experience
Source: Igwe Edith Adaku
Year: 2024

In textile installations, curators in Rivers State focus on ensuring that the cultural significance of these textiles is highlighted. They achieve this by curating exhibitions that reveal the origins, production methods, and traditional symbolism of the textiles. For instance, traditional textiles often include symbols that represent societal values, such as unity, strength, or spirituality. Curators must interpret these symbols and share their meaning with museum visitors, thus offering an educational experience that goes beyond the visual.

Moreover, curators are responsible for the preservation of these delicate artworks. Textiles are vulnerable to damage from light, humidity, and handling, so curators must ensure that the materials are protected while on display. This involves using climate controlled environments and specially designed display cases to prevent deterioration. According to Eze (2023), curators must balance the need for protection with the desire to create engaging exhibits that allow audiences to experience the textiles up close. Similarly, Nwosu (2022) highlights that the careful selection of materials and display techniques is crucial for maintaining the integrity of textile artworks, ensuring that they can be appreciated for generations to come.

In addition to preserving and interpreting the textiles, curators are also tasked with making these exhibits accessible and engaging to a wide audience. This may include interactive elements that allow visitors to understand the process of textile creation or workshops that connect local artisans with the public. By doing so, curators not only protect the cultural heritage of the region but also ensure that it remains relevant and appreciated by future generations.

Challenges in Preservation and Display of Textile Works in the Museum

Curators in National museum face considerable challenges in preserving and displaying textile works in the museum. Textiles are naturally delicate, making them vulnerable to various types of damage. One significant challenge is the environmental conditions found in tropical areas like Rivers State. High humidity, changing temperatures, and exposure to light can greatly harm the quality of textile artworks. Okoro (2020) emphasises that modern conservation techniques, including climate controlled display cases, are crucial for safeguarding these fragile pieces. However, implementing such measures often requires significant investment, which may not always be feasible for all museums.

Another challenge is the physical handling of textiles by visitors. While engaging the public with textile artworks is essential for fostering appreciation, allowing direct interaction poses risks. Touching textiles can lead to wear and tear, as oils and dirt from hands can damage the fabric. As Eze (2023) points out, curators are exploring innovative display solutions, such as incorporating digital technology and interactive exhibits, to mitigate this issue. For instance, virtual reality experiences and touchscreen displays enable visitors to engage with textiles' textures and patterns without physically touching them. This not only protects the artworks but also enhances the viewer's experience by providing deeper insights into their cultural significance. The narrative surrounding textile works is integral to their exhibition. Curators must effectively convey the stories behind these textiles such as their cultural significance, production techniques, and historical contexts while maintaining the integrity of the display. This task can be complicated when textiles are placed behind glass, as this can create a barrier that diminishes emotional connection. Curators, therefore, face the challenge of balancing the need for protection with the desire to foster meaningful viewer interactions.

According to Ikwuagwu (2022), integrating interactive storytelling elements into textile displays can help bridge this gap, allowing visitors to connect with the artworks on a deeper level. Training and ongoing education for curators in the latest preservation techniques is also crucial. The evolving landscape of textile conservation requires curators to stay informed about best practices and new technologies. Nwosu (2022), suggests that regular workshops and training sessions can equip curators with the necessary skills to implement effective preservation strategies, ensuring that textiles remain in optimal condition for future generations. Financial constraints also pose a significant challenge to effective preservation and display practices. The implementation of advanced preservation techniques and the acquisition of interactive technologies often require substantial funding. Museums in Rivers State may struggle to secure the necessary resources, limiting their ability to provide adequate care for textile collections.

Reimagining the Museum Space and Strategies

Curators are beginning to present textile installations as contemporary art, recognising the craftsmanship and creativity involved in their production. According to Nwosu (2021), this shift is crucial for reimagining the museum space, allowing artists and traditions to be seen as equal contributors to the global art scene. This transformation not only elevates the status of textile works but also promotes a sense of pride in local culture. In national museum, textiles hold deep cultural meanings that reflect the values, beliefs, and histories of the people. Through careful curation, these textiles are now perceived as more than just functional items; they are acknowledged as art forms worthy of international attention and appreciation.



Plate 4

Name: National Museum Service
Source: Igwe, Edith Adaku
Title: Appreciation
Year: 2024



Plate 5

Name: National Museum Service
Title: mask and masquerades
Source: Igwe, Edith Adaku
Year: 2024

Curators are utilising innovative display methods to enhance the visibility of textile art. For instance, interactive exhibitions that allow visitors to engage with the textures and patterns of textiles create a more immersive experience (Eze, 2023). This engagement fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural context and significance behind the artworks.

Strategies for reimagining museum spaces for textile art are vital in fostering a more engaging and inclusive experience for visitors. Interactive exhibitions can be developed, allowing visitors to touch, feel, and engage with the textiles. This hands-on approach demystifies the art, inviting audiences to appreciate the craftsmanship behind each piece.



Plate 6

Name: National Museum Service
Title: Nigeria ancient artefacts
Source: Igwe, Edith Adaku
Year: 2024



Plate 7

Name: National Museum Service
 Title: Raffia and Cane works
 Source: Igwe, Edith Adaku
 Year: 2024

In addition, storytelling through textiles can enrich the viewing experience, where each textile is accompanied by narratives explaining its historical and cultural significance. By sharing the stories behind the art works, curators can create emotional connections between the audience and the artworks. Community collaboration is essential; involving local artisans and artists in the curation process enhances the museum experience and fosters community ties. Curators can host workshops or collaborative projects that highlight the skills and techniques used in textile production, which significantly contributes to this effort (Okafor, 2021).

By working closely with artisans, curators can present textile art in ways that are both respectful of tradition and forward thinking. This collaboration also helps to keep traditional techniques alive in the face of modernisation, providing a platform for artisans to showcase their work to a broader audience. It allows for the continuation of textile production as a living art form, evolving and adapting to new contexts while retaining its cultural roots. Thematic installations can be implemented, grouping textiles based on themes such as cultural identity, tradition, or contemporary interpretations. This approach allows audiences to grasp the underlying connections between the works and encourages a deeper

exploration of the concepts and inspirations behind the textiles. Creating flexible display spaces is key; adaptable exhibition areas that can change based on the seasons or specific events can keep the museum experience fresh and engaging. This flexibility allows curators to introduce new themes and artworks regularly, thus attracting repeat visitors.

Conclusion

The curation of textile installations in National museum in Rivers State reflects a growing awareness of the cultural and artistic importance of textiles. In conclusion, through innovative practices curators are balancing the need for preservation with the desire to create engaging, interactive exhibits. By repositioning textile art as a contemporary and significant part of the global art narrative, curators are helping to decolonise museum spaces and promote cultural pride. The collaboration with local artisans further strengthens the connection between traditional and modern textile practices, ensuring that the rich heritage of textiles continues to thrive in the present and future.

Recommendations

Having completed this paper, the following suggestions are required.

1. **Increased Investment in Conservation Technology:** Museums should invest in advanced climate-control and preservation technologies to protect the fragile nature of textiles, especially in the humid climate of Rivers State. This would help ensure the longevity of these important cultural artefacts.
2. **Enhanced Training for Curators:** Curators should be provided with specialised training in the latest textile conservation and display techniques. Such training could include digital tools and interactive exhibits that bring textiles to life while maintaining their integrity.
3. **Collaborative Exhibitions with International Museums:** Establishing partnerships with international art museums could elevate the global status of Rivers State textiles. Joint exhibitions and exchanges of expertise would bring wider recognition to the region's rich textile traditions.
4. **Engagement with Local Communities:** Museums should continue to engage with local artisans and communities, providing platforms for them to demonstrate and sell their works. This collaboration would foster a deeper connection between the

museum and the public, ensuring that traditional techniques remain alive and relevant.

5. Decolonisation of Museum Narratives: Continued efforts to decolonise the presentation of African textiles by framing them as contemporary fine art rather than merely ethnographic objects should remain a priority. This approach would challenge outdated perceptions and contribute to a more inclusive global art dialogue.

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