

AN APPRAISAL OF SOTONYE ALLEN ORUBU'S MIXED MEDIA PAINTING "SEKI"

By

Bala Henry Ibama

Department of Fine and Applied Arts

Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

Abstract

Orubu's painting titled "Seki" is a captivating mixed media painting artwork. The painting depicts the artist's profound connection to traditional African culture and influence towards waste recycling. This paper provides an analysis of Orubu's painting titled Seki, its cultural significance, and the cultural heritage of the Kalabari people. "Seki", is a vibrant and visually outstanding mask piece. Orubu employed different media including polythene, foil, and fabric waste to produce the painting. Observably, the background of the painting expresses features that represents the Kalabari environment in which the Seki masquerade is been displayed. The Seki Masquerade in the painting appears to be the focal point of the painting. The painting was inspired by the colour inherent in the waste materials and the historical value of the Seki masquerade in the Kalabari kingdom. The production of Sotonye's painting titled Seki was guided and influence by expression theory. Findings reveals that Seki masquerade happens to be one of the outstanding masquerade been celebrated by Kalabari people. Unfortunately, due to cultural imperialism and modernisation many persons don't participate in its activities as it use to be, thus making the culture to erode. This paper concludes that the "Seki" Masquerade painting that was produced is evidence of Sotonye's commitment to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the Kalabari. The paper has contributed to knowledge as it helps in creating more awareness on the cultural heritage of

the Kalabari people and also creates awareness on the need to recycling waste to produce painting.

Keywords: Seki, Painting, Kalabari, Masquerade, Cultural heritage, Foil.

Introduction

Painting is the art of representing objects in two-dimensional form through the use of colour and brushes on a flat plane. It is an aspect of visual art that deals with colour, brushes and flat planes (canvas, board, wall, paper, etc.). It is the technique of representing objects through the use of colour, brushes, etc, on a flat plane or surface. The art of painting can be traced to the early men expedition in search of food and upgrading the standard of living during the pre-historic era. The early men saw painting as a means of communication and beautification. They use paint to achieve the unseen. For any animal that proves stubborn to kill, they (the early men) would make a painting of the animal in the cave where they live, after which prayers and rituals would be done; once they come in contact with such an animal, the animal would remain prey to them. In recent times, painting has served man in diverse ways, in the beautification of both the interior and exterior of the environment, historical documentation, advertisement, and mostly as an occupation. Sotonye Orubu was born in the early 1970's and hails from ancient Ke-town in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State Nigeria Orubu (2022). He attended Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt (now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt), and obtained a bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed) in Fine and Applied Arts (Painting Option). Subsequently, he attended the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and obtained a Masters of Art in Art Education (MA. ART.ED) (Painting) and a PhD in Painting and Technology in the Department of Fine and Industrial Art from the same university.

Currently, he is the head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, (Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt). He has organized and participated in several Art Exhibitions. He has published in several scholarly journals and books; also, has attended conferences. He is a member of several professional bodies; amongst them is the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), the Teachers Registration Council (TRC) and

Rivers State Indigenous Visual Artists. He is happily married and has three children (Orubu, 2022).

Concept of Seki (Crocodile Masquerade)

The Seki masquerade, produced by Sotonye, is displayed during the Owu-Aru-Sun colourful ceremony of the Kalabari. The display of the Seki masquerade is also viewed as one medium through which the culture and tradition of the people are showcased and the activities of the Crocodile are expressed. As pointed out earlier, the masquerade historically is own by the Chief Ikpo Harry compound.

According to Johnbull (2012) the Masquerade was acquired by Chief Osoma Iwo and given to the Chief Ikpo Harry compound. The philosophy behind the display of the masquerade is to promote culture of the various compounds. The need to produce this painting is to document the culture for posterity. "Seki" is a captivating painting by Dr Sotonye Allen Orubu, a celebrated Nigerian artist known for his dedication to preserving and promoting traditional African culture and, recycling environmental found objects the panting "Seki" exhibits a dynamic interplay of color, composition, and texture. The vibrant colors, intricate and meticulous craftsmanship captivate the viewer's attention, creating a sense of visual harmony and balance. Bala (2024)

Crocodiles belongs to the family of Crocodylidae true crocodiles are large semiaquatic reptiles that live throughout the tropics in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australia. The term crocodile is sometimes used even more loosely to include all extant members of the order Crocodilia, which includes the alligators and caimans (family Alligatoridae), the gharial and false gharial (family Gavialidae) among other extinct taxa. Although they appear similar, crocodiles, alligators and the gharial belong to separate biological families. The gharial, with its narrow snout, is easier to distinguish, while morphological differences are more difficult to spot in crocodiles and alligators. The most obvious external differences are visible in the head, with crocodiles having narrower and longer heads, with a more V-shaped than a U-shaped snout compared to alligators and caimans. Another obvious trait is that the upper and lower jaws of the crocodiles are the same width, and the teeth in the lower jaw fall along the edge or outside the upper jaw when the mouth is closed; therefore, all teeth are visible,

unlike an alligator, which possesses in the upper jaw small depressions into which the lower teeth fit. Also, when the crocodile's mouth is closed, the large fourth tooth in the lower jaw fits into a constriction in the upper jaw. For hard-to-distinguish specimens, the protruding tooth is the most reliable feature to define the species' family. Crocodiles have more webbing on the toes of the hind feet and can better tolerate saltwater due to specialized salt glands for filtering out salt, which are present, but non-functioning, in alligators. Another trait that separates crocodiles from other crocodilians is their much higher levels of aggression

Sotonye Allen Orubu's and His Mixed Media Painting Technique in the Painting of Seki (Crocodile)

The term mixed media simply means the combination of different media's or mediums to produce a work of art. Understandably from different scholar's literary works, it is obvious that the assertion is not far from reality. Ochigbo (2003) defines mixed media as a technique involving the use of two or more artist media, such as ink and pastel or painting and collage, which are combined in a single composition. According Sayre (2003) mixed media is the combination of two or more media in a single work. Similarly, Gilbert (2002) defines mixed media as a descriptive of any works of art employing more than one medium, for example a work that combines painting, collages and screen print. Uttridge (2007) defines mixed media as a painting which combines different painting and drawing materials and methods. Any materials can be used, such as pages from magazines, newspaper photographs, fabric, soil, or packing. Similarly, Wilkins (2005) states that it is a term use to describe a work composed of a variety of different materials, usually, encompassing elements to painting, sculpture, and even architecture. Russel (2000) also opines a similar view that, it is the rise of several different materials, methods, or technique in one work of art. Fichner – Rathus (2007) in a more concise term states that mixed media is the use of two or more media to create a single image. Deducing from the definitions, assertion and explanation on mixed media it is vivid that mixed media entails the combinations of two or more-un-identical materials used in creation of an artwork. In other words, it is the technique of production art work; the thing to note is that two or more materials, media or medium to produce the art work. The word mixed is to create or form something by combing one thing with another, it is also to blend into one mass, mixture or several substances or ingredient

together and stirring them, so that they are no longer distinct. Media are avenues of expression or dissemination of information or message, graphically, or pictorials on a surface with various materials.

Historically, what we all know nowadays as mixed media art began during the early twentieth century, when artists looking for a substitute for what they saw as hidebound academicism started including things and pictures that were not regarded as art materials in their works. Examples of everyday materials being included in ceremonial or aesthetic objects could be found dating back to prehistory, however, these were produced with different motives, and served quite a distinct social purpose compared to the objects all of us refer to as “art” (Clara, 2011).

Walker (2015) states that the main types of mixed media art work is collage, Walker adds that other types includes three – dimensional (3D) sculpture, installation art and online interactive art. Understandably from the view of Wikipedia (2015) while creating a painting or photographs work using mixed media technique to create picture presenting a collage painting in most cases in contemporary days it is important to choose the layers carefully and allow enough drying time between the layers to ensure the final work will have structural integrity. If many different media are use, it is equally important to choose a study foundation upon which the different layers are imposed. According to Liphart (2014) mixed media art is basically any form of art created using more than one medium. In terms its types with which an artist’s or art collector should be familiar. Liphart further make us to understand that type of mixed media involves in sculpture, collage and assemblage among others. In sculpture it has to do with artist combing clay or other materials like wire, wood, glass or even found objects to produce art work. While in collage it has to do with gluing of found objects. And in assemblage, it is like collage and it has to do with the creating of artwork by attaching objects to a sense.

According to Smith, Wright and Horton (1999) the dominant figure of this century is Pablo Picasso, who exploited an extraordinary range of materials during his long career. The author adds that he proved that any materials could be transferred into art by placing familiar materials, such as bicycle saddles in a new context. His treatment of both materials and techniques set a precedent for a level of pictorial invention for all artists in this century.

In the same vein, Jackson Pollock is another mixed media exponent who according to James (1999) states that Pollock used drip technique to produce his most celebrated pictures, in which he engaged his whole being in the act of painting.

Dr. Sotonye is a very popular visual artist who at no time have disappointed his audience in the use of collage painting technique in the production of his work. Collage derives his name from the French word: *coller*, " meaning to glue" or "to stick together"; collage is a technique of art creation, primarily used in the visual arts, but in music too, by which art results from an assemblage of different forms, thus creating a new whole. (Compare with pastiche, which is a "pasting" together.) A collage may sometimes include magazine and newspaper clippings, ribbons, paint, bits of colored or handmade papers, portions of other artwork or texts, photographs and other found objects, glued to a piece of paper or canvas. The origins of collage can be traced back hundreds of years, but this technique made a dramatic reappearance in the early 20th century as an art form of novelty. The term *collé* was coined by both Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in the beginning of the 20th century when collage became a distinctive part of modern art Sumarsono (2013).

Artistic Inspiration of Dr Sotonye Allen Orubu painting "Seki (Crocodile) masquerade

Seki masquerade is owned by Chief Ikpo Harry compound of Buguma town in Rivers State. (Johnbull, 2012:42). The masquerade like other masquerades that performs during the Owu-Aru-Sun colourful ceremony, the masquerade is usually displayed by the Ekine sekiapu society of Kalabari. Seki literally in English Language translation means crocodile. Crocodile according to Hornby (2010) is a large reptile with a long tail, hard skin and very big jaws. Hornby adds that crocodiles live in rivers and lakes in hot countries. Crocodile are aquatic reptiles that have a dreaded teeth and a V-shape jaw. The performance of the Seki masquerade is usually dreadful, because of the masquerade perform to reflect the nature of the reptile "Seki" (crocodile).

Johnbull (2012) points out that Seki masquerade can injure spectators if its controllers (Owutoriape) are not swift enough to control it. The researcher

was inspired to produce this work due to the historical value and the ability to document the masquerade ceremony for posterity.

According to Sotonye (2017) The title of this painting "Seki masquerade" is derived from the name of the masquerade as it is been called and known by its people Just as it were with the masquerade paintings, the structural built and composition of the painting was determined by the elements and principle of art. In terms of the composition of the background and foreground blue, yellow and green colours are the dominant colours that are prominent in the painting The Sike masquerade at the centre of the painting and the two men standing beside the masquerade by the right and left hand sides are structured and composed to achieve a centre of interest in the painting.

In the painting, the young men who appear at the back of the masquerade are known as "Asapu" young men, while the men besides the masquerade standing are known as "Owukoriapu controllers of the masquerade. The blue stripe cloth covering the face of the masquerade is transparent, thus, the masquerade sees through it.

Tools, Materials and Method of Application as it relate to Sotonye mixed media collage painting (Seki masquerade)

The materials used in producing this Seki mixed media collage painting, are polythene, foil and fabric waste were still the basic media used for the production of this painting. This basic media which is used for the research were cut into tiny pieces and were improvised as pigmented colour to produce the painting with other tools like canvas, scissors, cutter, palette knife, stapler, hammer and adhesive like polyvinyl acetate (PVA) otherwise known as synthetic gesso among others. In the mothed of application, Sotonye first cut the polythene, foil and fabric into different tiny sizes as it will fit in the painting, after that the he first transferred the thumbnail sketches on to the canvas, which is prepared with wooden frame, calico fabric, emulsion paint and glue. After the sketch has been transferred on to canvas he than began to paste the media according to the sketch. Basically, to show a true reflection of the masquerade in this particular painting fabric was used more to produce the human figures in the painting. Also, polythene was used for the background and

foreground. Also some pieces of foil materials were pasted on the cap of the masquerade.

Colour Application and Concept as it relate to Sotonye Mixed Media Collage Painting (Seki Masquerade)

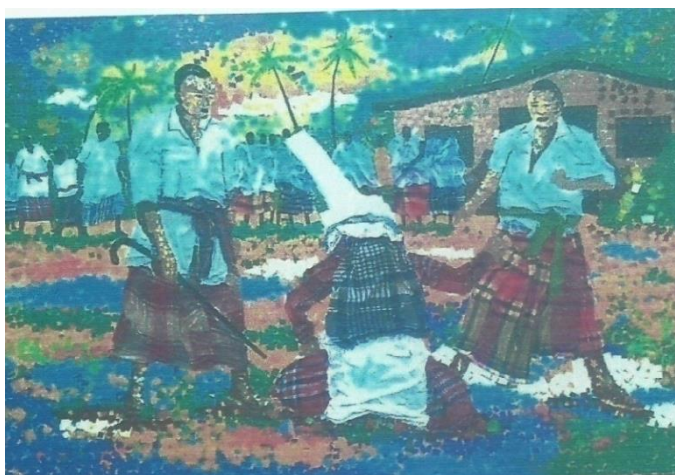
In the production of this painting, Sotonye uses and manipulation of colour to achieve the desire scheme for the painting was very interesting. The distribution and arrangement of colours in the painting by Sotonye was attempted to use colour variations to capture the basic principles of design. The use of blue, yellow, green and purple hues on the background and foreground of the painting is intentional because it was aimed to compliment and harmonize the colours in the painting as to easily catch the attention of viewers. Notably, the hue used for the production of this painting was improvised with different colours of waste polythene, foil and fabric which were cut into tiny pieces to capture painting.

Artistic Implication as it relate to Sotonye Mixed Media Collage Painting (Seki Masquerade)

The artistic implication in the production of this painting "Seki" masquerade display is just like other painting because, it has to do with the skillful manipulative ingenuity of the researcher in painting with the waste polythene, foil and fabric to synchronics structure and composition of the painting. Also, the skillful choices of different colours of materials to adorn the masquerade are very interesting and captivating. Importantly in the execution of the painting the element and principles of art were not left out. And they are showcased in the used of space, line, and colour and even in the arrangement of figures in the painting to achieve balance, dominance and harmony.

Cultural, Historical and Philosophical Interpretation of Sotonye Mixed Media Collage Painting (Seki Masquerade)

Seki masquerade produced by Sotonye is display during the Owu-Aru-Sun colourful ceremony of Kalabari. The display of the masquerade is also viewed as one medium through which the culture and tradition of the people are showcased and expressed. As pointed out earlier, the masquerade historically is own by the Chief Ikpo Harry compound. According to Johnbull (2012) the Masquerade was acquired by Chief Osoma Iwo and given to the Chief Ikpo Harry compound the philosophy behind the display of the masquerade is to promote culture of the various compounds. The need to produce this painting is to document the culture for posterity.



Artist: Sotonye Allen Orubu
Title: Seki (Crocodile) Masquerade Display
Medium: Polythene foil and Fabric
Size: 104cm x 140cm
Year: 2017

Conclusion

The results from the findings in Sotonye's painting Seki revealed the effectiveness and need to improvise the discarded waste polythene, foil and fabric to produce the painting as an alternative media for artist pigments in the production of collage paintings. The study also reveals the adaptability effectiveness, compatibility effectiveness, colour effectiveness,

cost effectiveness, durability effectiveness, aesthetics effectiveness and acceptability effectiveness in the production of collage painting Producing the painting in the studio it was understand that using the materials to produce collage paintings, it requires resilience and patience using the materials to achieve the painting. Because, the use of the materials required picking or gathering of the materials, cutting them into tiny pieces before the sticking of the materials to prepared canvas with the guide of a thumbnail sketch developed on the canvas. Most importantly, the painting was able to document the Owu-Aru-Sun colourful ceremony of Kalabari, through the Seki Masquerade using the collage painting technique.

Recommendations

With reference to Sotonye's painting titled, Seki the the researcher recommends that more explorations on the use of waste materials to produce collage painting should be encouraged, as it will open new vistas for creative expression. The study also recommends that, waste materials should be recycled artistically to document feelings of people, events, and the culture of our people in society. The documentation of the ceremony no doubt has been able to also give further exposure to the ceremony. Thus, Nigerian artist should try and develop the attitude of documenting their culture and tradition.

The study also recommends the continuous experimentation, exploration, and diveritication of the use of waste maerials as a way of recycling artwork will in near further be able to reduce the cost of artist pigment. Furthermore, an indept study on the costumes and decoration should be carried out on Seki Masquerade. Finally, a study should be carried out on the headpiece or masks of the masquerade during the display of Seki Masquerade.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge because it broadens the scope of using waste materials to produce painting, as a way of solving the problem in the hike of painting materials. Also, it opens new vista of creativity and exploration.

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