

CHAPTER

7

ULI MOTIFS: IT'S AESTHETICS ON ARCHITECTURAL WALL DESIGN IN NIGERIA

Godwin O. Uka

Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This paper looks into the need to give the Uli art Culture of Eastern Nigeria an artistic visual design identity based on their tradition. The exploratory design analysis which is used is based on the concepts ideas and materials for the old and new methods of the Uli culture. It has been analyzed and synthesized into a more dynamic indigenous system of visual communication in Nigeria that will enhance the general development of the society. The analyses of signs, symbols, posters and other artworks were carried out based on their artistic, aesthetic and functional design mainly as it concerns the Uli and Nsibidi visual method of communication design in modern times. The research attempted to harmonize the traditional and the modern method to develop a new visual communication method based on their culture and technology in recent times. The culture just like their close neighbour could also reduce these signs and symbols into simple codes for confidentiality, security, affection and economic transitions among themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Uli motifs or representations is an Igbo art form initially used by women to decorate the body and walls on certain occasions, it consists of a system of symbolic drawings or designs informed of animals, plants, material objects and other abstract designs. Uli motifs are studied to bring them closer to the visual artist and also to understand the aesthetic preferences in Igbo culture. The motifs represent things of physical importance, aesthetic appeal and relevance to traditional beliefs, (Willis 1987). Udechukwu (1981) stated that "Uli is calligraphic in form and it is possible that it was linked with some kind of writing somewhere in the past: that *ide* (to write) appears in *ide Uli* (to draw with Uli) and *ide ife* (to write something) or *ide akwukwo* (to write on paper) shows their close kinship as well as the possibility of one deriving from the other. In 1992, Obiora Udechukwu, showed works of both "traditional" and modern Uli women artists, in an exhibition titled Uli: Different Times, Different Hands organized at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, These creative exercises by both old and modern artists provided a new stylistic approach, that is most original and philosophical creative art idiom in the use of Nigerian indigenous images that emerged in modern time.

Willis (1987) in her work titled, *A Lexicon of Igbo Uli Motifs* asserts that, "the woman's perception of all aspects of life and nature, and most notably, ideas and objects which are held to be particularly important and representative of Igbo culture, are transmitted into visual vocabulary which provides important reference materials for designers, art historians, and ethnographers alike. It is on record that over the past thirty years, there have been many studies on the form and function of Uli drawing and design as seen in specific locations: K. C. Murray's notes on Uli painting in the Bende area of Abia State, Nigeria and M.D.W. Jeffrey's note on Uli paintings and design in Awke, Anambra State have provided a significant number of motifs. Uli draws and designs as an art form, expressing the culture of the Igbo people.

Architectural graphics like the Igbo Uli design is an abstract wall design mostly used to (enhance) enliven large public spaces which otherwise would be very dull. Design can involve recognizable motifs appropriate or typical to the situation or may be completely abstract. Signs and architectural graphics should be properly used in the environment to educate and make people aware of their culture. Sign system or architectural graphics is very important and useful in the present changing world of things. It points the way or directs travellers quickly and clearly, thereby playing a crucial role in accelerating and making life worth living. Colourful design elements are particularly useful in old and new buildings or projects where there is a rich mixture of shops and restaurants; in airports hospitals and public places.

Sign package and construction are not only determined by the graphics element of types and style but also by the environment in which the scheme has to appear and the function the signs are expected to play. The boundary between signs and architectural graphics (wall treatments, flags and banners for example) is often subtle, at times non-existence. Some wall graphics can serve the dual function of displaying information and providing a large area of colour. But architectural graphics as abstract wall designs are mostly used to (enhance) enliven large public spaces which otherwise would be very dull. Design can involve recognizable motifs appropriate or typical to the situation or may be completely abstract.

Art in the general sense is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as graphics, painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.

Art can be defined as a diverse range of activities executed by human beings, as well as the products of these activities. Art can be of many forms as well. Visual art is the creation of images that can be seen by the eyes. Visual art also includes sculpting, painting, ceramics, graphics, photography, and other visual media. Other form of art includes music, theatre, dance, film, and other arts that require performing fall under the performing arts category. Literature and other forms of interactive arts fall under the broader definition of arts while fields such as interior design, architecture, industrial design and the like fall under the category of applied arts. Art can also be defined as the representation of reality, communication of emotion, expression or other qualities. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that explores arts and related concepts such as interpretation and creativity.

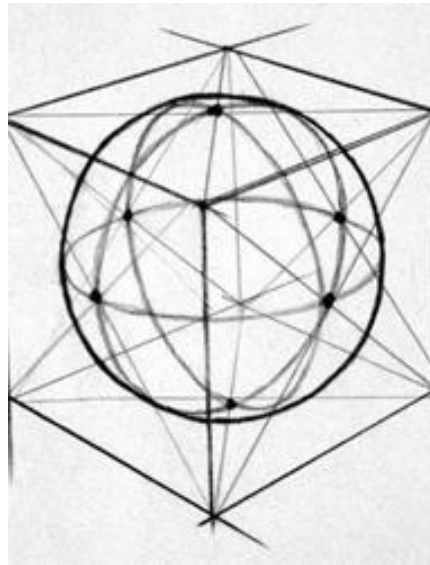


Fig 1: Geometric shapes and lines in Uli representation. Uka, 2000

Line, an element and function in art production is very important and useful in any visual representation. Akalaka in Igbo means "the lines of the hand or palm", predetermining that a man would encoded the choice he made at the point of reincarnation or returning to the world of the living. What is the line – It is the bases of all visual formation. The designer occupies a responsible position in society by creating functional and beautiful things using his hands through his brain condition by his mind either by inspiration, talent or intuition of expression as a force in the realization of works of art. The designer or artist using available tools at his disposal engages in a serious business of creation. The design through his media of expression he designs /creates and coveys the weight of his creative experiences. Techniques become the transforming medium of visual truth

Artist/designer is always concerned with their place and their works. Art is a historical document which mirrors and reflects the social tendencies of the time of its creation, which provides the viewer with the artistic motivation into the visual power of in the expansion of and exploration into the nature of man. Art is the geometric representation of ideas in different types of lines, circles, curves, straight and so on. Line is the bases of all formation; it can be viewed from different perspectives as a chain of spots joined together, a stroke made with a painful, narrow long mark. Lines can be thick, straight, zigzag etc. It can be similar and contrasting. Lines are used to divide space, direct the eyes and also create form. These are major types of lines. Actual lines, implied lines and three-dimensional lines. Line is a basic element in architectural construction.

Descriptive geometry is the branch of geometry which allows the representation of three-dimensional objects in two dimensions, by using a specific set of procedures. The resulting techniques are important for engineering, architecture, design and in art. This branch of mathematics is concerned with the properties and relations of points, lines, surfaces, solids, and

higher dimensional analogues, the shape and relative arrangement of the parts of something, for example, the " geometry of spiders' webs"



Plate 1: Spider Web Wall Uli design, are adopted for Uli design, Uka, 2020

Dimensional Form: here the designer crafted his works in various plans of space to represent the real objects intended to be produced. This type of design process can further be classified into 2D and 3D designs. 2-dimensional designs are works done on a flat surface. It involves such activities as drawing, painting on fabrics, wallpaper and advertising layout: designing in two plans. 3-dimensional designs are works executed in the round. It includes such activities as sculpture, architecture, handicrafts such as jewellery, pottery, leather works, clothing and machine-made objects such as chairs, automobiles, packages, 3D animation and so on, which are examples of 2D and 3D drawing. This is designed in three plans. All geometric aspects of the imaginary object are accounted for in true size/ scale and shape and can be imaged as seen from any position in space. All images are represented on a two-dimensional surface.

Descriptive geometry uses the image-creating technique of imaginary, parallel projectors emanating from an imaginary object and intersecting an imaginary plane of projection at right angles. The cumulative points of intersections create the desired image. The research into the aesthetics of Uli motifs design on architectural wells in Nigeria is very necessary as it concerns our culture, it is important to clarify the meaning of "aesthetics" as a domain to be investigated. Uli motifs or representations is an Igbo art form initially used by women to decorate the body and walls on certain occasions, it consists of a system of symbolic drawings or designs informed of animals, plants, material objects and other abstract designs. Uli motifs are studied to bring them closer to the visual artist and also to understand the aesthetic preferences in Igbo culture. Generally speaking, aesthetics can be a set of principles that concern the nature and appreciation of beauty, specifically, a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement.

Aesthetic qualities are qualities seen by the viewer when looking at the artwork. For the artist/designer, Aesthetic qualities are when art elements and principles come together to create a certain feel, to the image such as warm colours which create a sense of beauty and harmony. To demonstrate the value of learning about the cultural context of works of art, the aesthetic analysis

exercise that follows will also include reviewing some of the cultural components associated with the work. To demonstrate the value of learning about the cultural context of works of art, the aesthetic analysis exercise that follows will also include reviewing some of the cultural components associated with the work.

Visual metaphors are implied as a consequence of analyzing the relationships between the formal structures and subject matter of works of art. In addition to their role as symbols, the crosses can also function as visual metaphors if the artist will take the time to analyze their form-content relationships. A metaphor is a figure of speech that transfers one thing to another through implied comparisons. It is used to infuse writing and speech with vitality, which makes both more interesting; an example is when "the artist made minced meat out of his colours. When an artist starts thinking beyond merely identifying a work's visual elements (the character of its lines, shapes, colours, and so on.) and how these elements are organized. It is essential to consider the proposition that works of art speak to us through both their formal organization and the signs, symbols and metaphors that can be associated with them. Works of art become most meaningful for us when they evoke thoughts and feelings. "

Art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as graphics, painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Art can be defined as a diverse range of activities executed by human beings, as well as the products of these activities. Art can be of many forms as well. Visual art is the creation of images that can be seen by the eyes and these include sculpting, painting, ceramics, graphics, photography, and other visual media. Other forms of art include music, theatre, dance, film, and other arts that require performing fall under the performing arts category. Literature and other forms of interactive arts fall under a broader definition of arts while fields such as interior design, architecture, industrial design and the like fall under the category of applied arts. Art can also be defined as the representation of reality, communication of emotion, expression or other qualities. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that explores arts and related concepts such as interpretation and creativity.

Some of the Uli mortifies are; "Akalaka" which means "the lines of the hand or palm", predetermining that a man would be encoded by the choice he made at the point of reincarnation of returning to the world of the living. In Igbo culture, a line is the bases of all visual formation. The designer occupies a responsible position in society by creating functional and beautiful things using his hands through his brain condition by his mind either by inspiration, talent or intuition of expression as a force in the realization of works of art. The designer or artist using available tools at his disposal engages in a serious business of creation. The design through his media of expression he designs /creates and conveys the weight of his creative experiences. Techniques become the transforming medium of visual truth. Artist/designers are always concerned with their place and their works, it is a fact that Art is a historical document which mirrors and reflects the social tendencies of the time of its creation, it provides the viewer with the artistic motivation for the visual power of in the expansion of and exploration into the nature of man. Art can be represented in different forms and media; it can be a geometric representation of ideas with different types of lines circles, curves, straight and so on. Line is the bases of all formation; it can be viewed from different perspectives as a chain of spots joined together, a stroke made with a pain, narrow long mark. Line can be thick, straight, zig-zag and so

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Conclusion

Uli motifs have through this paper exposed the Igbo cultural heritage and its aesthetics on architectural wall design in Nigeria. Art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as graphics, painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Art is a historical document which mirrors and reflects the social tendencies of the time of its creation, it provides the viewer with the artistic motivation into the visual power of ... in the expansion of and exploration into the nature of man and his history.

The ideas or ways of doing something new are one way of changing and developing our environment. Uli and Nsibidi artists have introduced new ways of representing their works in the contemporary era. Africans have embraced creativity and innovation as a way forward towards the expression of our artistic ingenuity to the whole world. Creativity and spontaneity may succeed in limiting uncertainty leading to more stable living conditions in Africans. Changes brought by creativity and spontaneity can be subsumed under the more general framework of a quest for order which can be assumed to lie at the heart of any kind of socialization. The symbols, signs and motifs used by Nsibidi and Uli artists are a form of visual presentation and communication which indeed form part of our daily living. In the traditional setting these signs, symbols and motifs were used by our past generations to communicate messages, ideas and information in a form that can be read or looked upon for aesthetics and other purposes. The term "visual" presentation in graphics communication is used to refer to the actual presentation of information to the public through a visual medium such as text, images, symbols, and a combination of other graphics elements via a particular media of presentation.

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