

CHAPTER 3:

BATIKED FABRICS FOR INTERIOR WALL HANGINGS AS A MEANS OF DOCUMENTING AND SHOWCASING IGBO TRADITIONAL MOTIF

Contributed by
Ogobuchi Otuu and Pius Ntagu

INTRODUCTION

Means and methods of wall decoration change over time and according to locality. It is common knowledge that in the past, Uli mural paintings which were paintings of uli symbols on walls of mud houses both inside and mostly outside with the use of uli dyes which served as beautification, recognition and also as a method of preserving the symbols (Ikwemesi, 2015).

Moreover, modern wall hanging using fabric is not entirely new but with the traditional symbols, it makes the fabric have unique value even as we convert them to wall hangings. Recently, no one wants symbols to be drawn on his or her body but these symbols can be incorporated into the materials we use daily to make the materials unique items of value even in the foreign market (Nicholas, 1981).

Textile materials are what we use in our day-to-day activities, the clothes we wear, the cushions we sit on, curtains in our houses and even some decorations are made of textile materials. Our traditional motifs being incorporated in these textile materials is very important especially now that foreign motifs dominate our textile materials when they are traditional ones to fit. The influence of modern culture is gradually wiping away

traditional symbols and there will soon be nothing left to remember if we do nothing about it.

Fabric is one of the first things to consider for interior decoration. According to Farooq and Mohammad (2021), “fabric is one of the core elements in interior design”. One cannot decorate the inside of any house without the use of fabric as it is used for curtains, wall hangings, chairs, bedspread etcetera. Fabric therefore permeates every aspect of human life and can never be overused because of its characteristics of durability, light weight, softness, re-washable and drapery.

Uli wall decoration was indeed applied directly on olden mud houses but time brings about change and change itself begets change, so even with the new development of houses with concretes, people still long for wall decoration and beautification. The longing creates opportunities for different ideas and explorations and the use of fabric designed with Uli for wall decorations.

This study is about documenting Uli on fabric to be used as wall hangings with the use of Batik in other to showcase the Igbo traditional symbols. It utilises qualitative research method and involves studio experimentation which will reveal how the researcher was able to develop the finished product.

Purpose of study

To develop different methods through which Uli designs can be explored on fabric with the use of Batik and also ascertain if the fabric can be appropriate for interior wall hangings.

Research Questions

In what ways can Uli be explored on fabric using Batik? How can Batiked fabrics be appropriated to serve as wall hangings?

Literature Review

Uri or Uli as called by some areas in Igbo, due to dialect variations is not just a name of a symbol but is termed to anything that has to do with the symbol including the tree that produces the hue. It is also the name of a traditional mural painted by Igbo women with mostly animal motifs, geometry and sometimes stars, sun and moon with four simple colours; white, yellow, reddish brown and black. Uli design comes in different patterns; zigzag, round, concentric circles, dots and so on. Ikwuemesi (2016) said that Uli is the Igbo name for the indigo dye obtained from several species of plants and used to draw cosmetically on the human body. Uli is been used by the women of the Eastern part of Nigeria but the origin of uli or how the Igbo women came about the symbols is not clearly stated.

Ikwuemesi (2016) described Uli as the Igbo name for Indigo dye obtained from several species of plants. He further explained how the berries of these plants are extracted and ground for the dye to be pressed out of the marsh.

Uli is a tree, a seed, a pattern and motifs and most importantly, an art. It is an art that involves a combination of experience and skillfulness. This may be why Nwafor (2019) pointed out that the traditional uli painters worked directly without sketches or any form of prototype. The strokes are already embedded in the painter's fingers. According to her, Uli involves the use of painting or drawing stick /knife (mmanwauli), dipped in a liquid uli juice, which is then used to draw or paint on mud walls (usually shrine walls) or the body.

Uli is a creative activity mainly for beautification, though also associated with spirituality as it is believed that the art was bestowed to the women folk by the Ala(Earth goddess). Onwuakpa (2016) saw that by looking at some of these designs, one can easily deduce some of the images and their derivation such as the animals, the leaves, the oji and isioji but other motifs cannot be easily deduced. Uli designs communicate ideas vital to the Igbo

cosmology. The motifs were created from life experience and generally, the images reference the traditional Igbo life. (Nwafor, 2019). Uli may seem easy to draw but the art requires proper study for one to be recognized as an Uli artist. “Uli artists or “Omenka” (a name given to any skilful person) are mostly elderly women who got their training right from childhood either by watching their mothers, relatives or other uli artists’ artwork” (Onwuakpa, 2016). Sandra (2010) observed that the renewed interest in uli recognized the inventiveness and skill of the traditional Igbo woman as an “artist”. Traditionally, uli body drawing or painting is a real boost to a woman’s ego because it gives satisfaction and confidence to any woman decorated with it. Uli as a body decoration turned the body into a living sculpture and object of beauty and certainly, one of the finest Igbo body arts. Uli is appreciated by all as it touches both the spiritual, artistic and cultural life of Igbo (Onwuakpa, 2016).

Smith (2010) noted that the imposition of Western and European values on Igbo cultural practices suppressed Uli as an art form and on that note, I agree with Ikwuemesi (2016) who stated that the heritage of the Igbo cannot be fully discussed without the look at the almost extinct uli body and wall painting practised by women. Though Uli body decoration is no longer popular among Igbo women; this is associated with the fact that most women wear clothes that cover most parts of the body which acted as a platform on which uli designs were traditionally displayed.

Batik

Batik is a resist method that uses wax as a resist agent to hinder dye penetration. In batik, wax is melted and applied with the use of stamps or foam to detail out designs needed on the fabric so that when dyed, the waxed areas will resist the dye penetration thereby revealing the designs. Samsuddin (2020) defines batik primarily as a cloth decorated by drawing lines in wax to protect part of the undyed cloth from colouring in the dye bath, he further said that

batik motifs and their products have high potential to sustain themselves in a global market as it has a special place in the world of 'oriental textile'. Wardani (2014) described batik as a piece of cloth that is made traditionally with certain decorative 'motifs' of batik. This is still pointing out the fact that batik is not just about the wax resist but also about the motif to certain people. According to Tajul and Harozila (2021), Batik making is a method of creating beautiful textile material or cloth involving the use of candles and colouring materials based on natural or synthetic colours. Batik is also a resist dyeing method that requires wax for resistance which is why it is often referred to as wax resist method. While tie-dye uses ropes to resist dye from penetrating the fabric, wax resist as the name sounds involves the use of wax (paraffin or beeswax) to resist dye penetration. The wax is melted and applied on fabric with the use of tjanting, foam, brush, clamp etc., to resist dye from penetrating thereby creating the designs. The idea or concept behind batik is that any part of the fabric that the wax touches even if it is by mistake, those particular areas will not absorb colour when dipped in a dye bath because the wax will not allow the dye to penetrate those areas except if the dyer intentionally or unintentionally cracks the wax during dyeing to achieve more designs. Because of this, Batik requires dexterity and carefulness in planning, waxing and dyeing the fabric. After colouring the fabric, the wax is usually removed with the use of boiling water and that is when the clearer version of the designed and dyed fabric will be revealed. According to Ramli (2021), in creating batik, several traditional techniques can be used such as canting, metal block, wood block, screen and lately, dedicated computer software to create digital batik products, while It is said that Batik originated from Java, Indonesia that most of the best Batiks in the world are still made there and that Indonesian batik predates written records. According to Wardani (2014), the art of batik in Indonesia has a unique aesthetic and various decorative motifs. Its application can

be found in the decoration of temples which become inspiration for the development of decorative motifs in clothing material.

Wall hangings

The art of textile hanging is considered one of the richest and most sophisticated Arts in the fine arts sector. (Ibrahim and Mahmoud, 2018) .Radwan, Regab and Tawab (2020) termed textile wall hanging an ‘era mirror’. Ibrahim and Mahmoud (2018) also noted that wall hanging is one of the oldest and most famous applied arts which has high aesthetic and artistic values. For instance, it helps in completing the interior architectural design. A wall hanging or wall decoration throw or throw rug as termed by Parmar and Malik (2018) can give your living area a great new look without any hassle. It is an important means of adding aesthetic value to public buildings and houses. Besides, it is used in covering wide areas of empty walls (Ibrahim and Mahmoud, 2018). Wall hangings can fit in any area of your house. Equally important, most wall hangings are made with interesting colours which can easily align with the colours in any room. In a similar view, Parmar and Malik (2018) stated that the colour combinations and the patterns used in wall hangings almost fit any decoration and style. Ibrahim and Mahmoud (2018) pointed out that textile hanging designs were always considered the reflection of its era and its culture and artistic fields. Hangings do not differ in their aims from wall graphics but it is more different and accurate compared to the graphic as it needs skills in the implementation stage. (Ibrahim and Mahmoud, 2018). In an earlier study by Faheem and Ibrahim (2017), they expressed their views on wall hangings as follows:

The wall hanging is one of the important effective elements in interior design because it has a significant effect in enriching and integrating interior emptiness in terms of aesthetics and function. It gives an aesthetic touch resulting in achieving several

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functional purposes as providing privacy, concealing a part of the light and emphasizing the impression and identity of the place

Parmar and Malik (2018). states that Wool, cotton, polyester and chenille are the primary materials used to make our wall decoration. They also noted that wool is the most used because of its inherent qualities.

Theoretical framework

The theory adopted for this study was Imitation theory. It was first proposed by Jean-Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904). This theory was reached from the sociological side through phenomena of crowds, fads, crazes, crime and fashion, while James Mark Baldwin (1861-1934) independently proposed and arrived at his conclusions from the side of individual psychology, studying the mental development of children. They both argue that the unity of society is dependent on imitation, both on its functional and structural sides. Apestegua et al (2004) argue that imitation plays a large role in adults' learning behaviour and everyone who watches children grow will attest that imitation is a great source of learning. Baldwin (1895) termed the repetition of actions of one person by another under the influence of suggestion offered "the key to social mystery". To him, all activities of men in the society, regardless of how simple or complicated it is including the creation of science and art, are relatively outcomes of the process of imitation. (Ellwood, 1909)

Albert Bandura in his social learning theory emphasized the importance of observing, modelling and imitating the attitudes, behaviours and emotional reactions of others (McLeod, 2023). Imitation enjoys the status of a powerful explanatory concept in a majority of theories of social development. It is considered a powerful and efficient mechanism for ensuring that the child will develop patterns of behaviour consonant with the prevailing cultural pattern (Kuhn, 1973).

Tarde (1900) believes that what forms social life is the effect of the suggestion-imitation process which starts from one creature possessing a single idea or act which is passed unto one of its neighbours, then to another and so on. New ideas spread via imitation, those that resemble existing norms being more readily imitated. He proposed three laws of imitation: (1) the law of close contact; (2) the law of imitation of superiors by inferiors; and (3) the law of insertion (where new behaviours either reinforce or replace customary ones (Juillion, 2020)). Professor Baldwin in his child's study argues that the prime and method of a child's learning is by imitative absorption of the actions, thoughts, expressions of other persons and that all his absorption from immediate associates is through his tendency to imitate. "Society grows by imitative generalization of thoughts of individuals" (Ellwood, 1990).

While Pluto thought that Art is pure imitation and therefore deceptive, Aristotle argues that it is not just the act of copying but of imagination. Pluto further argues that since learning and admiring are pleasurable, imitating works of art or poetry is also pleasurable. Ellwood (1990) argues that the intellectual and moral development of individuals is by imitating the actions and attitudes of those they look up to and as such societal change is a continued imitation of thoughts of some individuals, a leader or a genius. Apesteguia *et al* (2004) argue that who one imitates is more important than how one imitates. They observed that imitation is more pronounced when subjects observe others with whom they directly compete rather than others who have the same role but play in different groups. The instinct of imitation is implanted in a being since childhood which is how they learn to speak and walk by imitating adults.

Life is built on imitation and most of the individuals, communities and even nations grow by striving to imitate one another. This project talks about using batik and tie dye methods to design Igbo motifs on fabrics to be used as wall hangings. without imitation, there is nothing about the project that will hold; I had to

imitate someone who had dyed before to learn how to colour fabrics, had to imitate someone who has waxed before to be able to get to the stage I am with batik and most importantly “Uli” motifs are built on imitation. None knows the first woman who came up with the idea of Uli but other women kept imitating it until men joined in and as such, the knowledge keeps transgressing.

One of the major criticisms as regards imitation is that we make conscious choices to determine who we imitate and as such do not just imitate anyone. We mostly imitate those who we consider to be superior and imitate our enemies or inferiors only when it is advantageous. Another critic on imitation points out that it is impossible to understand how the “instinct to imitate” has come to dominate the whole process of human society, and alone to constitute the method of all personal and social growth. Society is not just built on one instinct (the tendency to imitate) but is also as a function of many other instinctive impulses. Therefore all social organization is physiological rather than psychological as the theory claims. While imitation generalizes the idea of imitating progress, critics argue that natural selection plays a major role rather than imitation.

Production stage

Studio Experimentation

The first stage was the generation of design ideas through the studied Uli motif

Materials and equipment used include but are not limited to VAT dyes, Sodium hydroxide (Caustic soda), Sodium hydrosulphite, Dharma fibre reactive dyes, Sodium carbonate (Soda ash), Urea, Foam, Plastic containers, Pens, pencils, chalks, Stove, Waxing surface, Candle wax, Rope, Gloves, Dye bath, Nose mask, Waxing pot, water, Cotton fabric.



Fig 1: preliminary sketches to guide the designs
Source:OgobuchiOtuu(2023)

Method of studio production

1. The first thing done was to de-size the fabric by washing off the chemicals used during the production.
2. When the fabric dries off, you plan your design on the fabric according to how you want the outcome to look.
3. The next stage is to wax the fabric following your plan, you wax the fabric by applying melted wax on the fabric with the help of foam.

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4. You carefully dye the fabric so as not to distort the waxed area. You can do this by applying dye directly or by dying it in the dye bath depending on the kind of dye you are using and the design you wish to achieve.
5. When the dyed fabric is set, you de-wax and rinse the fabric, if dried, it is ready to be used for the interior and you have to decide what exactly you want to use it for.
6. You can mount it on a frame to be hung with a frame or sew and pipe it to be hung directly.



Plate 1: De-sizing a plain fabric. Source: OgobuchiOtuu (2023)



Plate 2: Waxed fabrics. Source: OgobuchiOtuu (2023)



Plate 3: Dying of fabrics. Source: OgobuchiOtuu (2023)

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Plate 4: Outcome after rinsing. Source: OgobuchiOtuu (2023)



Plate 5: Sewn fabrics to be hung directly. Source: OgobuchiOtuu (2023)



Plate 6: Fabrics mounted on frames. Source: OgobuchiOtuu (2023)

Presentation and Discussion

There are so many Uli motifs out there but this study utilized a combination of few of these motifs. All the finished works from this study were done with the combination of these few selected Uli motifs. Though one may see different images being intertwined and intermixed in the outcome, all the images are the combination of *agwoloagwo*, *Isi-oji*, *okara Isi-oji*, *ije-agwo*, *okirikiri*, *kpum kpum* and *akwukwo* used as desired by the researcher.



Plate 7: OtuuOgobuchi (2023) “Face it” Batik on assembled fabrics 60cm x 45cm

This work was achieved by cutting the fabric in pieces, waxing and dyeing them differently before assembling them again to form a whole. Each piece reassembled has its unique colour even as they were joined to form a whole. At the end, it was piped with a black fabric which served as the background. This work was embedded with Uli designs which replicates from the centre. It combines different Uli motifs intertwined to form a whole. From the top is Isi-oji with leaves right below it. under the leaves is another Isi-oji that meets with the curve that introduces the agwoloagwo facing each other. The agwoloagwo here is used to portray The interconnectedness of all things in the universe, including individuals, communities, and nature which is why the leaves and Isi-oji were incorporated in it. we are all connected in one way or another and we will keep missing out until we face this obvious ideology.



Plate 8: OtuuOgobuchi (2023) “The waves of life” Batik fabric mounted on a frame. 50cm x 41cm

This particular work was achieved by waxing the fabric directly, applying the first colour at some point then completing the waxing before finally dyeing it. It features combinations of Uli motifs ranging from *agwoloagwo*, *isi-oji*, *okala isi-oji*, *ije agwo*, *okirikiri*, *kpum kpum* and *onwa* which form different levels of circles in different colours, the waves and the dots that flow with it, the spiral and the dots that flows with it etc. These motifs were combined to portray different kinds of movements and transgressions, The work utilized only two colours, yellow and black which are two of the original colours used for Uli wall paintings.



Plate 9: Otuu Ogobuchi (2023) “choice” Batik fabric mounted on frame as a sequence. (The wings 44cm x 38cm)(the centre 91cm x 36cm)

This particular work is a sequence art. It is an art that involves the combination of three different frames, two medium sizes and the large one at the centre. Though the work generally depicts a soaring bird, a careful look at the detailing will unveil the Uli motifs used in designing the art and though it utilized three different frames, it was meant to align to create a single image. A clearer look will unveil the combination of Isi-oji, kpum kpum, okirikiri, okara Isi oji, agwoloagwo, and ije agwo. Each of the frames can be hung in isolation as an abstract work and the frames can be hung upside down to depict a bird soaring downwards, the bird can also face sideways depending on the arrangement, and the smaller frames by the sides can also change directions. This work can be arranged in so many different ways to mean different things.



Plate 10: OtuuOgobuchi (2023) ‘giving back” Batik on assembled fabric 65cm x 27cm

This is yet another work designed by disjoining the fabric at the earlier stage and this was created with the use of two Uli motifs, ‘agwolagwo’ and ‘okara isi oji’. It combines four different colours, blue which introduces the first okara Isi oji that landed on the yellow, the yellow receives then form a large spiral(agwoloagwo) that extends to form the twin spiral on purple which also shares okara isi oji with yellow and also with lemon. The spirals even though they flowed from different colours, meet in the centre to form a whole. Each of the colours was dyed individually and joined to align, then piped with a black fabric to highlight the design.

Summary

The essence of this project was to create more means of displaying Uli motifs on fabric by using it for wall hanging as a decoration for interiors in other to portray and popularize these motifs. During the research, it was observed that the youths of the present-day dispensation have little or no knowledge of the existence of these motifs even as artists continue to use them in their works. It was also observed that using fabrics for wall hangings in Nigeria creates

opportunities for question since the use of fabric is not common in Nigeria. Using these as wall hangings in built environments will enable the public to absorb the fullest possible awareness and knowledge of these motifs and also imbibe the idea of using fabrics for wall hangings. There is so much fabric can do in homestay other than just curtains and bedspread, yet just few people know about the use of fabrics for wall hangings and even the few recognize mostly works that are on frames. This research birthed new ways of exploring Batik on fabric to be used as wall hangings not particularly on frames.

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