

Designs of the past, Art of the Future: A survey of Uli Symbolic Motifs of the Igbo and their Adaptation to Woven Rugs in Contemporary Textile Art

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Abstract

Rugs play important roles in furnishing homes and offices. They add to the aesthetics and also warm up these places in case of cold weather. Apart from keeping the room warm, they could also be hung on the walls purely for aesthetic purposes. And whatsoever that is hung up on the wall for people to see, attracts lots of attention either by criticism or appreciation. In the past, uli symbolic motifs of the Igbo speaking area in Nigeria, were used to decorate the bodies of humans and walls of houses, but this practice is almost going moribund. These symbolic motifs are highly decorative and connote the Igbo world view. As such, this paper upholds that when they are transferred onto rugs as surface designs, they may be able to aid their sustainability in the world of interior decoration and designs. The research designs employed in this study are descriptive survey and studio exploration. It is a mixed method research. Qualitative analysis and some statistical tools of percentages and bar charts were used to analyze the data collected. The research instruments used in this study are questionnaire, photography and observations. One among the many findings of this study reveals that the *Uli* traditional designs, being designs of the past are suitable for decorating woven rugs and some other art works of the future by giving them indigenous identity. It summarily recommends that these decorative motifs should be utilized in art and designs quite often in order to aid their sustainability.

Keywords: Uli motifs, Woven rugs, contemporary art, textile art, adaptation.

Introduction

Decorations, paintings and alterations of the body to convey some messages are parts of every culture globally. The adornment of the body means a lot to particular societies that have them, since they created them for specific purposes and have special values for them. Shufelt (2002) believes that globally, every culture decorates, covers, exposes or alters the body to convey their social norms and declare their social messages. He further mentioned that many meanings associated with particular adornment are constructed by the society, although the origins of the mode of adornment may be a mystery. In Africa, there are ancient tradition for decorating and accessorizing the body in rich and varied ways. Traditionally, many Africans wore little to cover their bodies, leaving their skin exposed and available for decoration. They adorned themselves in four general ways: scarification, body painting, beadwork and jewelry. Nigeria for instance is a society of about 250 distinct groups that comprise of creative individuals and diversified cultural background which offer immense opportunity to study different types of traditional designs and art as stated by Alau (2006). One of those groups are the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria who practiced *Uli* traditional painting on which the study is focused.

Historically, *Uli* art was found all over South Eastern Nigeria, where the Igbo people mainly reside, but by the mid-20th century the tradition had almost died out

(Chudi-duru 2011). These *Uli* designs based on plants, animals, heavenly bodies, ritual objects and everyday life experiences were described by Willis (1989) as “very elegant”, she further stresses that “*Uli* designers desire was to create harmony, clarity and precise marks that were compatible with the body which represented the welfare and beauty of a woman”. *Uli* designs did not originate from man and did not develop naturally as reported by Okeke (1983), rather the unity of man, his environment, the ancestral spirits and substances were masterfully represented on the walls by the *Uli* artists. Anyaoha (2010) asserts that it is on record that experiments with *Uli* traditional designs started as far back as the late fifties by Uche Okeke. She goes further to reveal that Okeke experimented with *Uli* motifs by adapting them into his Art forms of paintings and drawings and that is what gave birth to a new style. Ikwuemesi (1992) supports this by saying that the early works of Uche Okeke in the late fifties and sixties gave birth to new style in Art.

This new style of art introduced by Uche Okeke has been in use by various artists from Nsukka art school. They have been able to adapt these symbolic motifs in their works of contemporary art practice, some of which are in painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphics and textiles. In textiles, some artists have even printed and dyed some of the symbols as design motifs on fabrics. Interestingly, fabrics are not the only textile items yearning for the touch of *Uli* decorations to celebrate Igbo culture in the textile world. This study observed that there are rugs decorated with indigenous motifs from other countries globally. Examples are Persian rugs, Turkish rugs, Japanese and China rugs and it felt that if *Uli* design motifs are used on woven rugs as they are found to be decorative, symbolic and fast disappearing, it will help to record and preserve the tradition on the part of weaving in textiles and may also come under African design rugs.

Despite the fact that this decorating tradition is old and dying, it was valuable and useful to the Igbo community. However, it is now difficult to find a girl or an old woman wearing *Uli* designs on her body as observed by Ikwuemesi (2005). He stresses further that the designs and motifs are open to uncountable modernizing adaptations which have been neglected. From the recent happenings, the study has observed that no artist or designer has attempted to adapt *Uli* design motifs to off loom woven rugs. The idea of adapting these motifs on rugs is to bring into limelight a tradition that is fast disappearing so that the cultural aesthetics of *Uli* tradition can be showcased and appreciated. Rugs are used for interior decoration in most homes. Most people relax, sleep and play on their rugs. It draws the attention of everyone that steps into the place where it is used. The researcher is hopeful that the findings and results of this study will be of immense benefit to students of art and design, who may be ignorant of the adaptations of the various African traditional motifs to different art forms.

***Uli* traditional painting**

From the culture of the Igbo, girls and women learnt and practiced the art of body painting and wall decoration known as *Uli* tradition. Okeke (1977) is of the view that *Uli* is the highest form of art drawing in Igbo land practiced by women. Mba (1995) believes that the origin of *Uli* in Igboland is not known, however she speculates that it may have developed out of natural love for aesthetics or as a tool for magic and religion. She further mentions that *Uli* decorations started on the human body and later moved to the walls and other traditional items like carved doors, earthen wares among many others.

Okpalaoka (1972) and Udechukwu (1990) mention that it could have started as a form of sign language or some kind of cosmetic art, a characteristic which has been retained up to the present times. They also narrated that the *Uli* designer or the Igbo creative thinker does not believe that *Uli* design came from man, neither did it evolve naturally. But that the designers were possessed by the Igbo spirit of design. They further recount that the traditional Igbo belief of Ala (goddess of earth) which symbolizes both beauty and goodness is the source of both beauty and creativity which has influenced Igbo creative thinking fundamentally. They explained that Asele is the female spirit of design and the male opposite is Badunka. According to Okeke, (1977) Badunka is the genius of the manipulative skills or design production technique. This implies that the origin of *Uli* design concept is traced to both Asele and Badunka. Okeke (2005) shares the same view with Okeke (1983) in Chukueggu (2003) and Agbayi (2005) that the finest *Uli* artist in Nimo- Igbo mythology is Asele. He believes that Asele transcended the human sphere with her body designs and outclassed the spirits in their world. He also believes that she surpassed the manipulative skill of her male counterpart known as Badunka. Agbayi (2005) reveals that Asele is the mythical artist celebrated in folk songs. She is believed to have surpassed all human's ability of creativity and that of the ancestral world. He mentions that the *Uli* artist is held in awe in her society. He further explains that drawings of some animals like python, some species of rodents and cat family like leopard were the first *Uli* design motifs associated with Asele and Budunka and goes on to define his concept of uli as involving "the material and method of design presentation for body decoration and wall painting".

According to Okonkwo (2006), Uli/Uri town in Ihiala local Government area in Anambra state got its name from the *Uli* decorative art. He goes on to tell a story on Uli traditional art which goes like this: Njurumuwaonu (Uri) himself had three other brothers one which is Okija, from the same parents. Their mother Nwobi was endowed with the gift of painting the human body with black dye (Uri) to the satisfaction and taste of the society. It was quite probable that her skill in painting the human body was extended to painting the carved products of her son, Njuruwa. He was a wood carver but was so ugly that he felt very inferior and despised by his brothers. Even the whole community knew him as a very ugly man. The mother (Nwobi) was very worried by the thought of his son's ugliness so she came out with an idea of painting the son's body with very beautiful designs of *Uli*. When this was done Njuru became very handsome, the *Uli* patterns on his body dominated his Ugliness. When he came out to the Village square, people admired him so much that they came out with a slogan that wherever Uli designs are applied, ugliness disappears. They started calling him Uli/Uri. By calling him Uli it replaced his name so his descendants are known as *Uli* people till date.

Willis (1987) describes Uli as an art form, or painting that expresses the culture of the people, and says that the motifs represent things of physical importance, aesthetic appeal, and are relevant to traditional beliefs. Okeke (2005) explains that Igbo design elements were originally abstracted from natural objects and served as ritual pictorial language which was employed to communicate ideas and also to beautify objects. The Igbo were already practicing the *Uli* art before the advent of the early European visitors. According to Ezeh (2005) Basden wrote in 1917 after having spent seventeen years among the Igbo that he expressed much fascination with the artists. Basden (1983) reports that he saw both men and women wearing the *Uli* designs but the group of

artists he saw executing such designs were all women. Okeke (1983) also shares a similar point of view with Basden (1983).

Willis (1989) believes that, the *Uli* body paintings could be recognized by their curvilinear and dotted patterns in dark blue or black colour. She further describes the *Uli* patterns as elegant as they are drawn on different parts of the body. Similarly, Oloidi (1995) identifies “*Uli* as a very linear, curvilinear, calligraphic, visually precise, space emanating and greatly elemental art, with highly romantic appeal and culturally implied symbolism”. Okeke (1999) supports this notion and proclaims that *Uli* is characterized by its celebration of lines, its spontaneity, and its uses of natural and negative spaces as well as abstraction of natural and cosmic forms into linear design motifs. Ikwuemesi (2005) adds that both *Uli* body and wall painting are based on spontaneity. The designers do not work with carefully planned sketches or designs.

Mba (1995) is of the same view that *Uli* painting is not guided by any set of rules or motifs. Ikwuemesi (2005) reports that *Uli* is generally used to refer to the style and tradition in which it is used. He further reveals that *Uli* is not only the plant and the colours that *Uli* is also the design elements, the symbols and motifs and that they are open to a myriad modernizing adaptations. Traditional body and mural painting involves the application of *Uli* on the mud walls and some parts of the body, then the use of the indigenous colours to highlight the images and figures. Different colours are used in decorating and they enhance both appeal and value.

Okeke (1983) in Chukueggu (2005) explains that traditional designers in Igboland make use of different colours which have very deep interpretations. Some popular colours such as black, red, and brown are used at burial and title taking ceremonies. He further elucidates that the identification of the colour attributes of the *Uli* designs whether applied on the walls or human bodies was not left out.



Plate 1: Uli monument (2009). Artist: Unknown.
Source: dept. of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka.

He says that yellow signifies joy and beauty and it is usually complemented by both red, brown, Indigo blue popularly known as anunu has some connection with the spirit of the ancestors. The indigo colours were also used to dye some woven materials worn by some revered Igbo masquerades. White signifies purity; the white (Nzu) traditional chalk symbolizes acceptance and warmth. However black or black-greys are regular colours for *Uli* mural decoration or wall painting. They are used for the outlining of the designs on the walls before painting with other colours. The walls of the shrines were mainly outlined with Nzu (white traditional chalk) in a simple manner. Okekes (1983) findings explain that the *Uli* strain is extracted from the *Uli* pods. The plants that produce the pods that harbour the tiny larvae which stores the *Uli* strain is also known as *Uli*. The design process is called “Ide Uli or Uri” (to write Uli) or *ise Uli* (to draw uli). Also *Akika aja* (wall design are the Igbo words for describing mural painting).

Pile rug weaving

According to Znamierowski (1973) a pile rug is one of the most luxuriant and decorative pieces one can have in a home. It has a thick pile of about four to five cm high. The colours used add depth to the woven piece. Bath (1990) defines rug as a coverlet whose surface was completely covered with either flat or pile or embroidery. She explains that the term rug is related to the old Nowwegian word rogg which means tufts or shaginess and the dialect word rugga or rogga signifies a coarse coverlet. Tayfun (1997) asserts that rug weaving is a tradition that spans the centuries over a number of cultures. There are several references to the art of weaving found in ancient scriptures and classical writing. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that prove these references were to pile carpets and not to flat weaves (kilims) some evidence of fragments found in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian tombs, showed various forms of flat weaving that were well developed more than 4000 years ago. There were other evidences which suggest that weaving of pile rugs existed in the middle east and other parts of central northwest and Western Asia long before 2000 BC goes on to say that definitely, Asia was the first continent to produce rugs and that it was definitely the nomadic wanderers who created them because the rearing of sheep, which was the prime source of carpet wool is a traditional nomad occupation. There was the necessity of thick coverings for people having to endure extreme cold and the development of the craft of weaving to replace the use of rough animal skins for warmth.

Bath (1990) and Znamierowski (1973) are of the same view that rugs came from Scandinavia (Northern Europe) where in the olden days their deep pile was necessary for warmth on boardships, during winter sealing and fishing trips and as “throws” in sleighs. They were also used as coverings on beds and were hung on walls and placed on floors for added protection against cold. Their patterns became more ornamental and colorful as they became less of a practical necessity.

Before the discovery of the Pazyryk Rug, the oldest pile rug fragments of ancient rugs ever discovered were found in East Turkmenistan in an area known as the Tarim Basin. This area includes parts of Northwest India, East Turkmenistan, Southern Russia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, Western China and Mongolia itself. He further went on to say that the art of pile rug weaving appeared in Europe sometime after 1000AD and likely in Spain because of its proximity to Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran. Other European countries imitated the craft and by the 20th century, weaving rugs were prevalent in

almost all of Europe. However, even with the production of rugs in Europe, one can still see through classical paintings that almost all the rugs depicted appeared to be of the Persian or Anatolian types. Rug weaving in Europe never became as important as it did in Asia and as a result, many Asian nations built enormous rug exporting industries over time.

Tayfun (1997) recounts that the Pazyruk Rug – the oldest rug ever discovered in 1947 by a Russian archaeologist, Sergei Rudenko, made a major discovery that had a dramatic impact on the rug industry. He found the oldest rug in existence. The oldest surviving pile knotted rug (Pazyryk rug) was discovered in the grave of a Scythian prince in the pazyryk valley of the Attai Mountains in Siberia and is presently on display in the Hermitage museum in Leningrad. It has been carbon dated to have been from the 5th century BC. Tayfun (1997) reports that the rug used the Ghiordes (Turkish) knot, warp and weft and contains a surprising 347.000 knots per square meter (255 knots per square inch). This rug shows a mixture of Assyrian, Achemenian (ancient Persian Empire) and Scythian motifs, and it is believed by some to be of Persian origin. Most believe it was woven by nomads who migrated from the area known as Mongolia or they wove it in farther east regions and brought it west wards. Many rug scholars believe that pile rugs originated in Mongolia and moved westward to Persian. They were weaving pile rugs before Mongolians learnt the art of rug making.

Tayfun (1997) further reports that one can never be sure where rug weaving originated because carpets are perishable and could not last four to six thousand years unless they are preserved in ice as the case with the Pazyryk rug. Even if Mongolians had been the first to weave pile rug, it was the Persians that took the craft and made it into an art form. He relates that there is no doubt that the weaving art, in general, started in central Asia. A popular explosion caused the inhabitants of that area to migrate to the western parts of Asia in order to find more prosperous land. These migrating tribes were called yoruks or nomadic tribes. During their migrations, these nomads, who were exposed to severe weather conditions, learned to use goat hair in the making of their tents. Goat hair is longer and much stiffer than sheep's wool. The flat weave technique was used in the making of nomadic tents. Just as with a little girls' braided pony-tail where strands of the shorter and stiffer hair stick out, the goat hair sticks out of the woven fabric, get wet, drop and partially cover the holes in the flat weave, thereby making the tent almost waterproof. Later on, these nomadic people felt the need to isolate themselves from the humidity present in the earthen floors of their tents. They then applied the very same techniques of flat weave to the making of floor coverings and called them "kilims". Since this was the area of paganism, most flat weave designs reflected stylized depictions of worshipped idols.

Over a period of time, the art of weaving improved and many items useful in everyday life were woven for example saddle bags for horses and camels used in transportation, warm blankets it is thought that these early blankets were woven in imitation of actual animal felts, room dividers in the tents, blankets for cradles. These woven products improved over time with additional uses. At first the nomads used to stack dried leaves and lay them in the beds, under the weight of the sleepers, the beds rapidly causing frequent replacement. Then in a further inspiration of using animal pelts as a model, the nomads started to add pile to the basic flat weaves which formed pile rugs. These first pile rugs were very supple, the nomads simply folded and threw them on horse's back to be used as sleeping bags during their long voyages. That was how the

pile knotted rugs came into existence. But presently synthetic yarns are utilized to weave rugs both manually and with the aid of some machines. Synthetic yarns were used all through the studio exploration on this study.

Although the *Uli* painting had a long tradition in Igbo land, yet it is a culture that has been neglected due to colonization and modernization. At present *Uli* traditional painting is in danger of being phased out, since it was a practice handed down from one generation to another through the apprenticeship system and most of the apprentices who were supposed to take over from the specialists are now discouraged from the practice. The need to adapt *Uli* traditional design motifs to various forms of art has become necessary and has recently begun to be emphasized so that *Uli* tradition can be preserved, retained, revived and kept alive.

Therefore, the problem of this study is that *Uli* traditional art is fast disappearing and becoming extinct. Although, efforts have been made in various areas by various groups to bring this art back to life, for instance A.N. Anozie, N. Mba and O.J Nwokoye attempted the use of *Uli* motifs to decorate textile fabrics using batik and printing methods. Ikwuemesi(2005), Aniakor(1973), Oloidi (1995) and Udechukwu (1984) also believe that these motifs are still valuable to the Igbos. Yet the area of rug weaving in textiles is yet to be covered. This study therefore, conducted a survey of the *Uli* traditional motifs of some selected parts of the Igbo Land and reproduced them on woven rugs using off- loom technique.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Survey some *Uli* design motifs of some selected parts of Igbo land.
2. Select some designs from the defined population of *Uli* design motifs and adapt them to woven rugs in the studio.

Research questions

1. What are the *Uli* design motifs of the Igbo people?
2. Which *Uli* design motifs were found appropriate for adaptation on studio woven rugs?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive historical survey and Practice Based Research (PBR) as the research designs. A likert – scale questionnaire was administered for data collection and uncontrolled observation was used for this study. Photographs were also taken on the sites where *Uli* traditional motifs were found. Then some of the motifs collected were carefully selected through random sampling and adapted on hand woven rugs in the studio exploration.

Population of the study

There are five states that make up the Igbo land namely: Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia and Enugu. States: All these states have 94 Local Government Areas in total. Imo-27, Anambra -21, Ebonyi-12, Abia-17, Enugu-17. Some other areas for example the Igbo in Delta State and parts of Rivers state are not included. All the local governments were not studied because they are too large to be managed in one single study. Therefore 10 Local Government Areas on which the research was carried out are as follows: Owerri,

Umuahia, Agulu, Ihitte Uboma, Ehime Mbanjo, Nri, Uli, Nsukka, Awka and Okigwe L. G. As and the 96 Uli Traditional motifs which were collected from these areas on which the study was carried out will make up the population. These 96 motifs will be carefully studied. They were collected from State Council of Arts and Culture, Archeology village, Museums, examination of records, observation, walls and bodies decorated with Uli traditional designs as discovered in museums, archaeological centres, private homes, shrines, Igbo home movies and institutions. Some of the data on Uli traditional motifs were collected from exhibition catalogues, unpublished thesis, computer search, books, newspapers, journals and seminar papers.

Sampling

Since it was not possible to investigate the entire population, the study limited its investigation to a small sample. From the 96 motifs extracted from Uli traditional paintings, 17 motifs representing 15% of the population were randomly selected as the sample size for studio practice of the off loom weaving for this study thus:

$$\frac{15}{100} \times \frac{96}{1} = 14.4 \text{ approx } 14.$$

Roscoe (1969) and Adetoro (1976) as mentioned earlier recommend that 10% of a population is a sufficient sample of a study in a research. The study chose 15% of the population so as to have many design motifs to experiment with. Three to four design motifs were combined to form units of designs which were used in adaptation to rugs using off loom technique. Some painters of Uli, lecturers, secondary school teachers and students of the Fine and Applied Arts (F.A.A) of the University of Nigeria Nsukka and Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri were considered knowledgeable enough to respond to the questionnaire during the field study.

Method of data collection and analysis





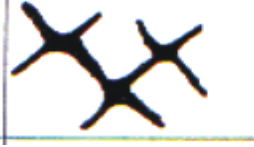




The statistical parameters used in analyzing data collected for this study are percentages, tables and bar charts.

Collection of Uli traditional design motifs (raw materials) for rug weaving

The random sampling of 17 design motifs was achieved by numbering the design motifs from numbers 1-96. Another set of numbers from 1-96 were written on small pieces of papers, folded and put in a container with a cover. The container was closed and shaken very well then picked randomly. The numbers picked were kept separately until the total number of 17 was obtained. 6 swatches of designs were made and out of these swatches, 4 were reproduced on rugs. The design motifs selected are hereby listed below as follows:

S/n	Names of design motifs picked	Design motifs picked
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Chika Chinyegwa Chudi-Duru

1.	Agwolagwo (Nri) (Concentric Circles)	
2.	<i>Aju nwa agbogho</i> (Young girls pad for carrying something on their heads)	
3.	<i>Ibe olu</i> (tools)	
4.	<i>Amadioba</i> (Thunder)	
5.	<i>Uli Obosa</i> (Bold type of Uli designs)	
6.	<i>Nra Isi, Mbo/Mvo isi</i> (comb)	
7.	<i>Agwa Agu</i> (Leopard spots)	
8.	<i>Kpakpando</i> (Stars)	
9.	<i>Mmonwu Agadaogwu</i> (masquerade)	







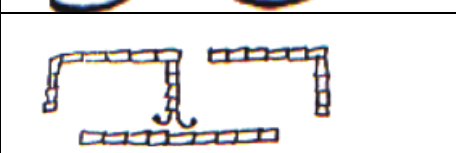
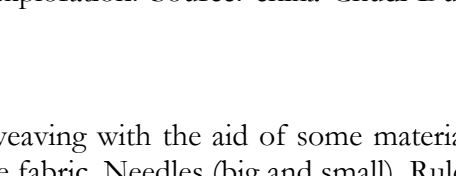
10.	<i>Okoroko, Okirikiri</i> (Circles)	
11.	<i>Mmepo or mmepe</i> (openings)	
12.	<i>Anyanwu</i> (Sun)	
13.	<i>Ngwele, Afo Ngwele, Ngwere</i> (Lizard)	
14.	<i>Ikperikpe Azu</i> (Back of fish)	
15.	<i>Ije agwo</i> (Snake movement)	
16.	<i>Odu Aka</i> (Ivory bracelet)	
17.	<i>Ebe arapulu arapu</i> (open spaces)	

Figure 1: *Uli* symbolic motifs utilized in studio exploration. Source: chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

Weaving Materials

The woven rugs were achieved through weaving with the aid of some materials listed below. Acrylic yarns of required colours, Jute fabric, Needles (big and small), Ruler, Permanent marker, Wooden table, tape measure ,A pair of scissors, Warping reel, Motifs, ¼ sheet of foam, Some yards of cotton fabric, thread for sewing, evostick. They are shown below.



Plate 2: Acrylic Yarn. Photo Credit: Chika Chudi-Duru

This is a long continuous strand of spun thread obtained by polymerization of acrylonitrile prepared for weaving. This is synthetic. Since the actual rug yarn that is to be used for the rug making is not available in the market, the acrylic yarn was used for the studio practical exploration of *Uli* design motifs on rugs.



Plate 3: Jute fabric Acrylic Yarn. Photo Credit: Chika Chudi-Duru

This is a plain woven fabric used for the background of the rug. This consists of fibres made from the bark of a jute plant (*Corchorus Olitorus* or *cochorus capsularis*). They are native to tropical Asia and cultivated especially in East Bengal and East Pakistan. It is widely used for cotton bailing, sacking, cordage and paper.



Plate 4: needles. Acrylic Yarn. Photo Credit: Chika Chudi-Duru

These are slender pointed piece of steel with an eye for inserting thirteen strands of yarn used in off loom weaving on the jute fabric. Half inch nails and hammer: These were used to fasten the jute fabric onto the wooden table. The jute fabric is not supposed to be shifting during the weaving process so as to avoid mistakes.

Permanent Marker The transfer of these design motifs outline onto the jute fabric were done with a water proof and smear proof alcohol based ink.



Plate 5: Wooden table. Acrylic Yarn. Photo Credit: Chika Chudi-Duru

This is a piece of furniture that has a flat, horizontal, smooth surface of wood, supported by legs. The jute fabric was fastened to the surface of the table with the aid of thumb tacks or nails. This makes the jute to lay flat on the surface of the table.

Tape measure: This is a long narrow plastic material, cloth or steel marked with centimetres, metres etc. used for measuring something. It was used to measure the jute fabric and get the desired measurement required.

A pair of scissors: A pair of sharp scissors was used during the trimming exercise. After weaving of the rug it is trimmed with a pair of scissors for evenness of the surface.



Plate 6: Warping reel. Chika Chudi-Duru, 2011

This is found in the weaving section of the studio. It was used to arrange the weft picks in a length wise pattern and helped in the counting out of the thirteen strands of yarn needed for the weaving.



Motifs: colour swatches of what the designer has in mind and what the weaving will look like after they must have been finished were achieved, and later progressed to paper designs. They are made up of *Uli* traditional design motifs. The motifs that were randomly selected were used to make some sketches. These colour swatches were used as guides to acquire the desired designs during the studio exploration.

Plate 7: colour swatches

Foam: Sheets of a quarter inch of foam were used under the jute fabric as an under lay. This enabled the rug feel softer when stepped on. It is part of the finishing processes applied to the woven rug. **Fabric for covering the foam.** According to Bath (1990) the proper choice of foundation fabric and yarn is essential in rugs. The ground must be loosely woven but stable. A plain weave with smooth warps and wefts of even weight is best. A plain woven cotton fabric is used to cover the foam used as the underlay during the finishing processes.

Sewing thread. The sewing thread and needle were used to sew the fabric that is covering the foam on to the back of the rug so as to neaten it.



Plate 8: shoemaker's thread

Evo-stick: The gum is used to gum the foam to the back of the rug before sewing.

Studio exploration

One way of adding interest to the surface of weaving is to tie knots on it to make a pile. Cut or uncut knots are called piles. As mentioned earlier by Creager (1974) the most common knot is the Ghiordes knot. It is excellent for making pile rugs. This particular knot was used during the studio exploration. Firstly, the overall size of the rug is a matter of personal preference in other words the sizes of the rugs used in studio exploration was chosen by the study. A total of four rugs were woven in this studio exploration, two of them were woven on half of the jute sack. The background of the rugs are plain woven fabrics made of jute fibre, it is usually brown in colour. But the colour doesn't matter since it will be completely covered with the knotting of the weft yarns. The jute fabric consisting of the warp and the weft is laid on a clean smooth surface of a table and fastened to the table with thumb tacks or small shoe makers nail with a hammer. This must be done so as to avoid any shifting during the weaving process. The firmness of the foundation fabric is very critical. It must be stable.



Plate 9: fastening of the jute fabric to the table. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru(2011)

After this process has been achieved, the outlines of the paper design were prepared and transferred onto the jute fabric. The sketch was in scale and to the dimensions of the rug. A permanent marker was used to draw out the outlines with the help of a ruler and other drawing instruments. The markings made on the jute fabric lasted throughout the studio exploration.



Plate 10: Weaving of the rugs in the studio. Source: Chika Chudi-

Before the weaving sets off, the warping process commenced. Znamierowski (1973) says that warping is a prelude to weaving, a well-made warp will make the hours spent at the actual weaving much more enjoyable. This required a lot of patience. The weft yarns used in the off loom weaving were prepared in the warping reel, this enabled the yarns used for the weft to be easily counted and arranged in the same length. It also made the weaving to be a bit easy. After the warping, the yarns were cut at one end. The warping reel gave the accurate measurement required for the weft during the weaving. The yarns were not unnecessarily long or short.

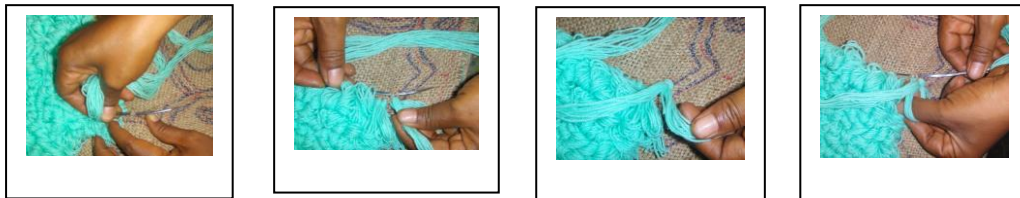


Plate 11: off-loom weaving processes. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru(2011)

Since this is off-loom weaving no shuttle is required as in loom weaving. Thirteen strands of yarn were passed through the eye of a big needle used for the weaving. Then the weaving now commenced. As can be viewed on plate 11 above. The loops woven were woven very closely to each other so that a dense effect was achieved on the woven rugs. The paper design was kept very close so as to be consulted in case of colours during the weaving exercise. For ease in handling the weaving started in the center then gradually moved to the edges until the work is finished. If the loops are to be cut, this should be done as work progresses. The study found out that it was difficult to clip

finished work except the loops at the nearby edge. The work is not done scattered by weaving some outside portion and leaving the inside. By so doing it will be difficult to complete the portions left inside. The yarn was being pulled through the ground fabric with the large needle. The study made use of the fingers to measure when making the knots varied and gave irregular and interesting effect. Scissors is used for clipping the hooks and for evenness. The weaving could be in concentric rows or may be in straight parallel lines, it all depends on the design of that is being woven. The amount of time actually needed will vary according to the intricacy of the design, the spacing of the loops, the size of the rug, the availability of the yarns required for the weaving and finance. When the weaving is finally done, if the loops are cut or not they will make a lot of differences. The study found out that clipped hooks look velvety, supple, have rich luminous colours of an oriental rug and the colours blended well. The study also experienced the expensiveness of the materials required but it is also a good way to use up odds and ends of a yarn.

Finishing: The Material used for the finishing of studio woven rugs using off loom technique were a pair of sharp scissors, sheets of foam, needle, sewing thread, a piece of cotton fabric and evostick. The pair of sharp scissors was used in clipping the loops and evening the filling yarns weft. After the clipping, the hooks felt very soft to touch and looked very pleasing to the eyes. The designs were very conspicuous and understood. The sheets of foam were gummed beneath the woven rug so as to cover up the jute background according to the measurement of the rug, and also to enable the rug feel soft when stepped upon. The foam will also help to absorb water if water pours on it mistakenly. Afterwards some cotton fabrics were sewn beneath the foam so as to give it a neat covering underneath and also to cover up the jute fabric used as the background and the foam. The cotton fabric was sewn or tacked with tailors' needle and thread unto the four sides of the woven rug to give it a neat finishing and after the finishing the rug is ready for use. Before the sheets of foam and yards of cotton fabrics were used, the exact measurement of the rug was put into consideration so that it was flat on the rug after sewing.

Rug I

Alau (2006) states that before any weaving is embarked upon, there must be a design or colour sketch of how the weaving will look like. He also goes on to say that the paper designs are made up of motifs and these motifs must have sources. During the practical exploration of *Uli* design motifs on studio woven rugs, 3 *Uli* traditional motifs were used on Rug 1. These could be viewed in the table below.

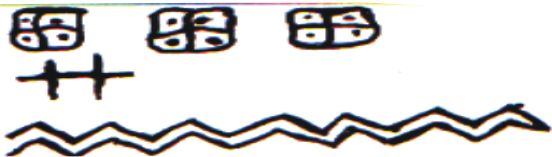
S/no	Name	Motif
1	Aju Nwagbogho	
2	<i>Uli</i> Obosa	
3	Ije agwo	

Figure II: Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

1. Aju Nwagbogho or Aju Umuagbogho is amongst the motifs used in the off loom weaving of rug I. it was derived from the padded base made out of rolled banana and plantain leaves, palm fronds or old wrappers, tied with rope from palm fronds from two sides to form a cross at the centre to hold the pad firm. It was used mostly by women to carry load on their heads. According to Ebekuo (2009), it was worn by mature women on the torso.
2. **Uli Obosa:** This means bold designs of *Uli*. This design is used in filling up spaces on the walls during the process of designing. They are normally used on large spaces.
3. **Ije agwo :** means the movement of a snake. It was derived from the way a snake moves on soft sand on a path way. Ebekuo (ibid) says that it was used on boarders in mural painting.

These three *Uli* traditional motifs were combined to form the design woven on rug 1 using the off loom technique. The sketch (1), paper design (2) and finished rug (3) below on plate LIV were created from the motifs.



Plate 12: sketch, paper design and finished rug. Source: chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

RUG II

The Uli traditional designs used in the weaving of this rug using off loom technique are five in number and could be viewed in table below:

s/no	Name	Motifs
1	<i>Anyanwu</i>	
2	<i>Agwa agu</i>	
3	<i>Mmepe</i>	
4	<i>Okirikiri</i>	
5	<i>Amadioba</i>	

Figure III: Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

Anyanwu means sun literally; *Amadioba* and *Okirikiri* have been discussed earlier. *Agwa Agu* literally means leopards spots. This motif was found to be used amongst many areas

of Igbo land in Imo State. According to Willis (1987), this design motif was found in many areas of the Igbo land. It was a common design motif. It signifies strength and beauty. The five *Uli* traditional motifs mentioned above were combined to form a design that was woven on rug II using off loom technique. The sketch (A), paper design (B), and woven rug (C) could be viewed on the plate below.



Plate 13: sketch, paper design and rug. Source: chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

During the practical exploration six colours of acrylic yarn were used during the off loom weaving. The colours of yarn used and the quantity consumed by the rug are listed as follows: Army green – 2 packets of yarn (32 balls), Peach – ½ packet of yarn (8 balls), Burnt sienna – ½ packet of yarn (8 balls), White – ½ packet of yarn (8 balls), Black – ½ packet of yarn (8 balls), Light green – 2 packets of yarn (32 balls). The total numbers of yarns used during the studio practical exploration of these *Uli* design motifs on studio woven rugs are 96 balls of acrylic yarn. The size of the rug is half of the jute sack which is measured in centimeters. The time spent during the off loom weaving was a month of 31 days. One and a half sheets of foam were used for the finishing at the back of the rug. One and a quarter yards of fabric were also used as a backing of the rug underneath. This was used to cover up the foam and sew unto the four sides of the finished rug.

Data from the survey of *Uli* traditional motifs

The data was collected with the help of a likert-scale questionnaire, observation and photographs. The questionnaire used for the survey of *Uli* traditional arts comprises of 6 statements with 5 to 6 sub-statements attached to each major statement. The sub-statements were used to enable the study get adequate information suitable for the analysis. The results on the questionnaire were analysed and are hereby presented below in form of tables and bar charts. The quantitative analysis was expressed in percentages using this formula:

$$\frac{\text{No of response}}{\text{Total no of respondents}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

where total number of respondents are 85. The data are presented on the table, so also are the bar charts below.

A the survey of Uli Traditional Motifs

- S1 *Uli* traditional motifs are not found in most areas of Igbo land in recent times.
- S2 *Uli* body painting is not practiced in Igbo land by women.
- S3 *Uli* wall painting is not practiced in Igbo land recently.
- S4 The *Uli* designs had specific values and were of great significance to the Igbo.
- S5 The *Uli* designs are part of Igbo cultural heritage.

TABLE 1

	Strongly agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (U)		Disagree (D)		Strongly disagree (SD)		Total (T)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
S1	50	58.82	22	25.88	13	15.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	85	100
S2	60	70.59	20	23.53	5	5.88	0	0.0	0	0.0	85	100
S3	60	70.59	18	21.18	0	0.00	2	2.35	5	5.88	85	100
S4	71	83.53	9	10.59	5	5.88	0	0.0	0	0.0	85	100
S5	73	85.88	7	8.24	5	5.88	0	0.0	0	0.0	85	100
		73.88		17.88		6.59		0.47		1.18		

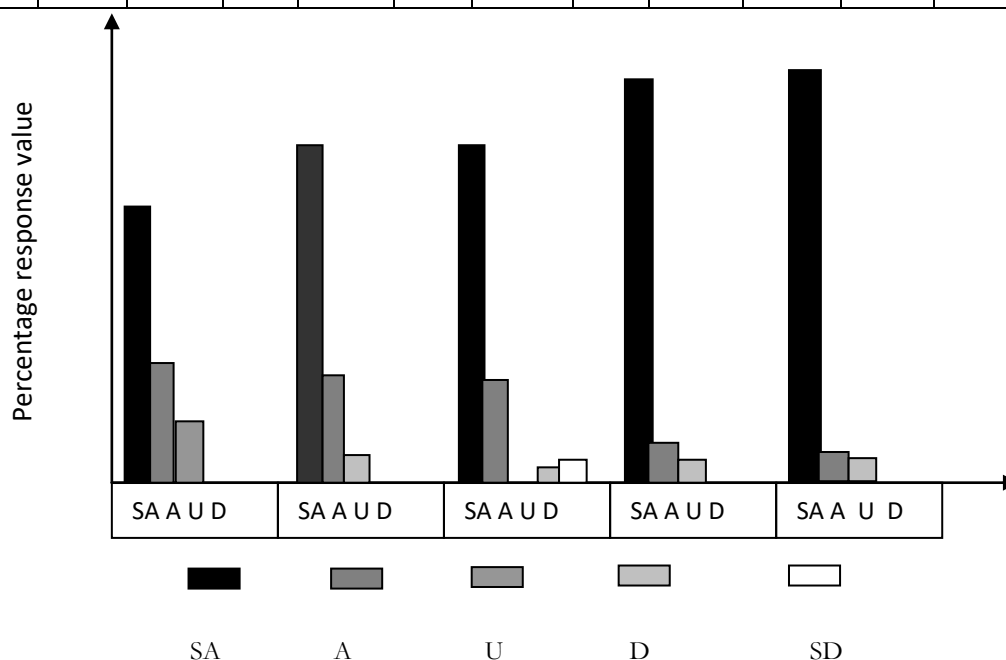


Fig. 5: survey of *Uli* traditional motifs. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

Table 1 shows that in statement 1 (S1), 58.82% of the respondents strongly agree that *Uli* traditional motifs are not found in most areas of Igbo land in recent times. In statement 2 (S2) 70.59% of the respondents are of the opinion that *Uli* body painting is not still practiced in Igbo land by women recently. Similarly 70.59% of the respondents

also strongly agreed that *Uli* wall painting is not still practiced in Igbo land recently. That *Uli* designs have specific values and are of great significance to the Igbo are the strong opinion of 83.53% of the respondents in statement 4. Lastly, 85.88% of the respondents in statement 5 are of the opinion that *Uli* traditional designs are part of Igbo cultural heritage. Based on the results of the data collected it could be assumed that *Uli* traditional painting is a dying art but since it has specific values, great significance and part of Igbo cultural heritage, it should be adapted into various forms of art which rugs in textile section is one so as to create awareness amongst the Igbo and the world at large. During the survey of *Uli* traditional motifs in some selected areas of Igbo land, considering the general results of all the 5 statements in the table, 73.88% strongly agree that *Uli* traditional art is not practiced in Igbo land recently, 17.88% agree that *Uli* traditional art is not practiced in Igbo land, 6.58% were undecided on the practice of *Uli* traditional art in Igbo land, 0.47% of the respondent generally disagree with 73.88% that agreed to non-practical of *Uli* art, but the percentage is insignificant, it will not be considered 1.17% of the respondents generally, strongly disagree to the non-practice of *Uli* art, this again is insignificant. Therefore, based on the overall percentage it could be assumed that *Uli* tradition art is not practiced in Igbo land but it is still part of Igbo cultural heritage that needs lots of adaptations to be projected into limelight.

Selection of some *Uli* designs

- S1 The *Uli* designs selected will produce appropriate designs for rugs making
- S2 All the design motifs will be suitable for adaptation in off loom weaving
- S3 The *Uli* designs selected are highly appreciated when woven on rugs.
- S4 Many designs motifs should be combined to form a unit of design for rugs.
- S5 *Uli* designs motifs depict African culture when woven.

TABLE II

	Strongly agree (SA)		Agree (A)		Undecided (U)		Disagree (D)		Strongly disagree (SD)		Total (T)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
S1	66	77.65	10	11.76	2	2.35	5	5.88	3	3.53	85	100
S2	52	61.18	20	23.53	7	8.24	4	4.71	2	2.35	85	100
S3	70	82.35	11	12.94	4	4.71	0	0.00	0	0.00	85	100
S4	48	56.47	20	23.53	8	9.41	5	5.88	4	4.71	85	100
S5	30	35.29	41	48.24	8	9.41	3	3.53	3	3.53	85	100
S6		62.58		24.00		6.82		5.00		2.82		

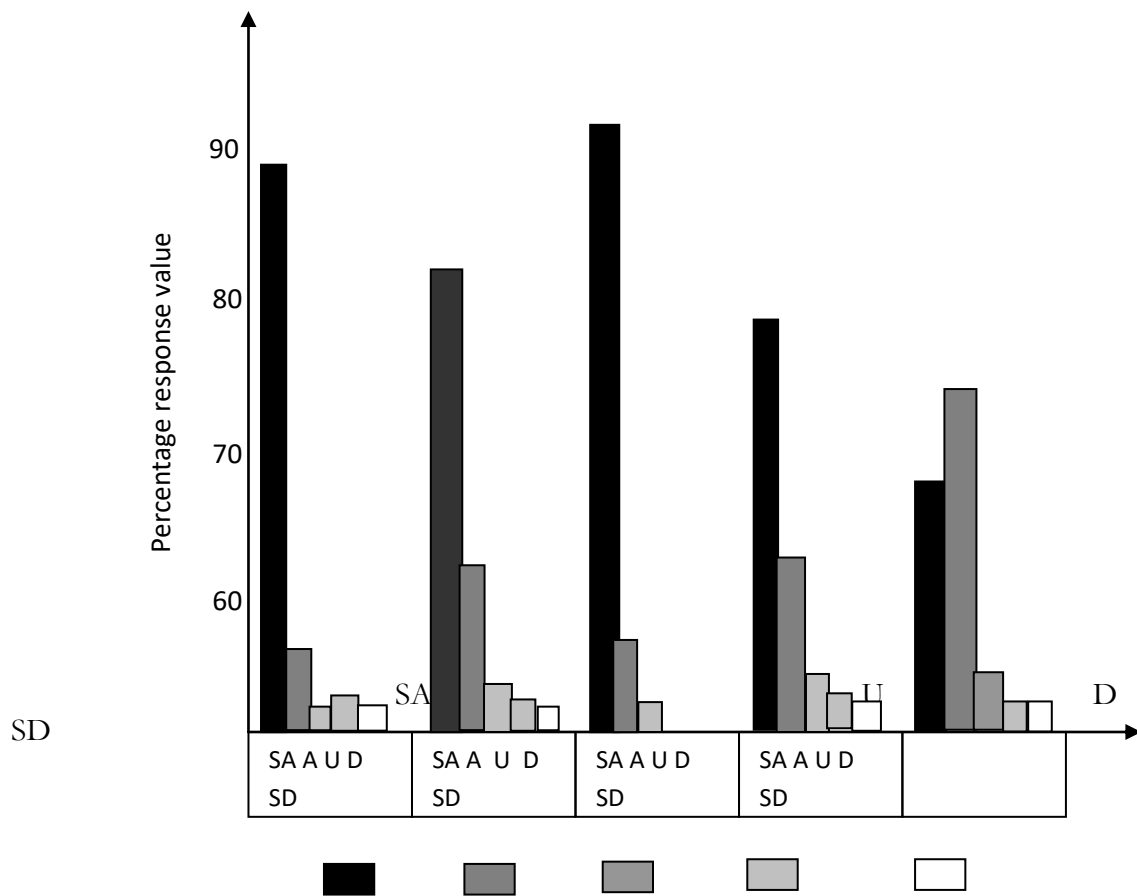


Fig. V: selection of Uli traditional motifs. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

From the data presented in table II above and on the bar chart it could be clearly seen that in statement (S1) 77.65% of the respondents strongly agree that the selected *Uli* designs produced appropriate designs for rug making, in statement (S2) 61.18% of the respondents strongly agree that all the design motifs will be suitable for adaptation in off loom weaving, in statement (S3) 82.35% of the respondents are of the opinion that the *Uli* designs will be highly appreciated when woven on rugs, in statement (S4), 56.47% of the respondents are of the opinion that many design motifs of *Uli* should be combined to form a unit of design for a rug, lastly in statement (S5), 48.24% of the respondents agree that *Uli* design motifs depict African culture when woven.

Basing on the results in table II, 62.58% strongly agree that although the selection is necessary for this study, all *Uli* design motifs will be suitable for adaptation in off loom weaving and will be highly appreciated when woven on a rug by combination of many design motifs because it depicts African culture also 24% agree on the suitability of *Uli* design motifs on woven rugs using off loom techniques and the acceptability of the woven rug which depicts African culture. Those that were undecided made up 6.82% while 5% disagree to the suitability of *Uli* design motifs on off loom woven rugs and

their acceptability. The percentage of the disagreed respondents are insignificant. Lastly 2.8% strongly disagree to the suitability of *Uli* design motifs on off loom woven rugs and their acceptability, again this percentage is also, insignificant. Therefore, all *Uli* design motifs will be suitable for off loom weaving since it involves off loom techniques, the woven rugs with *Uli* design motifs are highly appreciated because it is their own culture which they cherish. Since the *Uli* designs are all in single forms, 3 or 4 design motifs should be combined to form a unit of design to be able to produce appropriate designs for rugs.

Results from the studio practice



Plate 14: Rug 1. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2011)



Plate 15: Rug 2. Source: Chika Chudi-Duru (2011)

Conclusion

Uli traditional paintings are no longer practiced by women in contemporary Igbo communities. The *Uli* plants and the earth colours used in the body and murals have become very scarce but this painting tradition left its motifs which can be adapted to various aspects of art. The study emphasizes that *Uli* is not only the plants used for the body painting and the earth colours used for the murals, it is the design elements, the symbols and motifs which can be adapted into various forms of art. If this is done, *Uli* will be able to find new channels of expression using modern and western mediums.

Recommendations

The usage of *Uli* traditional motifs and other traditional motifs in Nigeria should be the main objective of any textile industry in Nigeria that produces rugs in order to make them relevant to the culture of the Societies that own them. By producing and marketing them, these motifs will be publicized. Other off Loom techniques in weaving should be explored using *Uli* traditional motifs on rugs. The colours used to execute *Uli* traditional paintings were derived from natural sources, therefore, should be further explored in the laboratories so that some colourants which could be useful in dyeing and printing on fabrics can be extracted and marketed. This will promote eco-dyeing and will also be eco-friendly.

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