

AN EXPLORATION OF ORGANIC MATERIALS FOR ART PRODUCTION: THE USE OF CALABASH FOR MODERN SCULPTURE

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Abstract

The use of calabash for utilitarian purposes has been practiced by most traditional cultures in Africa but since the advent of colonization and modernity, its domestic and general functions have been abandoned in favour of metals and plastic wares. Its use for art production as well, confined to traditional art and sufficient effort has not been made by postmodern artists to improve its utility relevance. This project attempts at exploring and reinventing calabash as a material for modern art production in order to increase its utility and relevance. The study employed a mixed method research design. Explorative, experimental and survey designs were used. The research comprises of two areas: The practical and the written literary aspects; the practical aspects include production of modern Sculpture using various exploratory methods while an analysis of the outcome of the works produced were documented in a written project format. Data for the study were gathered through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are oral sources such as interviews, Focused Group Discussions with members of Society of Nigerian Artists (Anambra State chapter) and artists' observation. The secondary sources include, written materials such as: projects, magazines, newspapers, books, thesis, bulletins and electronic publications. The collected data were useful in ascertaining ways which calabash can be reinvented and creatively used to produce sculptures that satisfy modern needs. A qualitative method of evaluation was employed in analyzing the data for the research. The outcome of the studio exploration of calabash for modern sculpture shows that calabash, which its domestic functions has become obsolete can be reinvented to achieve sculptures that can appeal to contemporary audience.

Keywords: Exploration, Organic materials, Calabash modern sculpture

Introduction

Calabash is not a new medium of artistic expression among Africans. It is an old indigenous craft hence the materials perform various functions in traditional African societies where it is decorated by many cultures using various techniques, styles and motifs. These motifs used in decoration are symbolic and express the cultural identity of the people. Calabash is a fruit which is highly essential due to its cultural and domestic values. When the calabashes are ripe for harvesting, those that are to be used as household utensil are gathered and soaked in water for several days until the seeds are rotten, but in most cases, calabashes are cut open and the contents are scraped out clean. The shells are dried under the sun until they are hard. In this case, the dried calabashes are ready for use. When calabash is freshly harvested the natural colour is light green. When dried, the outer skin changes to worn yellow (or dark depending on the specie) which darkens with age and use. A story from Kenya National Archive implies that calabash is the term used for artifacts made from the hard shell of a fruit in the gourd family "Lagenaria Siceraria." Once the calabash is dried and hollowed out it can be used for serving and storing food. It can also be used as an ink pot, cosmetics container and by market women as a money box. In West Africa, calabash vessels were used for many practical purposes. Their makers enhanced the beauty of these objects of daily use by decorating their surfaces in different ways. In this

example we can see how the gourds curved surface is decorated with abstract motifs of animals and other forms. One of the most interesting uses of the calabash is found among the Bura peoples of the North-Eastern State of Nigeria. Many Bura mothers still use calabash head covers (*dambalam*) to protect their babies from the hot sun and flies, the *dambalam* is often part of a baby's layette and may be elaborately decorated with cowrie shells and coins as well as engraving, since babies are typically carried on the mother's back, leather straps affixed to the calabash enable a mother to tie the *dambalam* in place covering the head of her baby. Although medical experts are discouraging this custom and a neighboring people, the Tera, recently abandoned the practice, the Bura mothers who use *dambalam* value them highly. There are many other uses for the calabash, Women use bottle-shaped calabashes as butter churns. Farmers sow millet or guinea-corn grain from small calabashes. "Beanie-size" calabashes are sometimes used by Moslem men as funeral caps. Foreign residents of Nigeria have discovered even more uses for these ancient fruits; they convert large, decorated calabash bowls into lampshades - Konan (1974).

In spite of these many ways in which calabashes are currently used in northern Nigeria, it seems likely that fewer and fewer will be seen as the years go by. In Nigeria, as in other places where gourds have flourished, the arrival of Westerners brought containers made from metal, glass and plastic. Today these materials seriously challenge the role of the calabash. Contemporary markets display brightly colored enameled pans and bowls and many people now use them instead of calabashes. A young girl used to receive numerous decorated calabashes of different sizes and designs as gifts at the time of her marriage; nowadays she often receives brightly colored metal pans, plates and bowls. Even in Northern Nigeria where there are still traces of the craft, calabash containers may entirely be replaced by metal and other manufactured materials which are desired because they are "modern."

The declining preference for decorated calabashes among the peoples of northern Nigeria will probably mean that fewer and fewer persons will learn this difficult art of gourd designing in succeeding generations. In some localities accomplished artists have already turned to other activities.

Historical records show that in the past, calabashes were widely used in various parts of the world. It is known that gourd containers were common in the Hawaiian Islands and on Easter Island, that calabashes were used in surgery by the Indians of the Sierra in Peru to repair broken skulls and that they were grown in the southern United States by various Indian tribes. Gourds found in an Egyptian tomb have been dated to 3300 B.C. and there is little doubt that they were used as well by the early nomadic Bushmen in Africa.

Today, calabashes are grown and widely used and decorated in only a few scattered places around the world. Northern Nigeria, especially the North-Eastern State, is one of these places. Even in the southern and western parts of Nigeria, calabashes are now seldom seen in the towns and marketplaces. They are still grown, but calabash decoration has largely become a commercial art, adapted to the production of plaques, vessels, baskets and spheres of purely decorative value which are sold primarily to foreign tourists. In northern Nigeria, calabashes remain common in the everyday lives of the people. They are beautifully decorated as perhaps nowhere else on earth and they are cherished by many of the people who still use them. But the age of the calabash is passing here, as it has already passed in other parts of the world. The peoples of northern Nigeria are now writing one of the last chapters in the fascinating story of the long association of calabashes with the ancient cultures of mankind.

Calabash comes in various species, shapes and sizes which are all channeled to their best objective and purpose. When it is in form of gallon, it is best used for water or palm-wine storage, but when in form of container, it can be used for carrying goods or selling food items as done by the Fulani milk sellers in the North. The craft of Calabash in olden days has a high decorative significance which is mostly noticeable when they are used for

interior decoration. A lot of intricate designs are created all over the body of the Calabash which adds beauty to the object. The motifs for decoration ranges from zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, or combination of two abstract shapes to appeal to man's sense of beauty. Adepegba (1986) in his *Decorative Arts of Fulani Nomads* adds that "the designs of the Fulani nomads are combination of various abstract motifs like circles, squares, triangles and lines".

Today, the use of calabash for utilitarian purposes has almost been replaced by plastic products and its use for art production confined to traditional art. In view of this, the researcher attempts at exploring and reinventing calabash as a material for modern art production in order to increase its utility and relevance.

The use of calabash for utilitarian purposes has been practiced by most traditional cultures in Africa but since the advent of colonization and modernity, its domestic and general functions have been abandoned in favour of metals and plastic wares. The study therefore attempts at recreating new values from calabash for artistic purposes, especially sculptures that are decorated with interplay of *Uli* designs. This will give the traditional material a new look and expose it's use to postmodern art practice and to innovators who are ever sourcing for new media of expression.

Objectives of the Study

Since the domestic functions of calabash are fast becoming obsolete, this research is set out:

1. To create calabash-based sculptures in order to further popularize the use of calabash as a modern sculptural medium in Nigeria.
2. To explore and conceptually use calabash as commentaries for addressing contemporary socio-political problems in the society.
3. To exhibit the practical projects for the view of the University community and gather their views on the works which will in turn be used in validating some of the claims in the research.

Research Questions

1. How can an artist create calabash-based sculptures in order to further popularize the use of calabash as a modern sculptural medium?
2. In which way could calabash be explored to serve as commentaries for addressing contemporary socio-political problems in the society?
3. How could the exhibited practical project in the university affect the viewers' opinion?

Literature Review

Calabash according to Ozigbo (2012) "is a tropical American tree of bignonia family or its large gourd-like fruits". In olden days, calabashes are economically viable because of the various purposes they serve at home. Some of these purposes include; preservation of food items, fetching and water storage, palm wine storage, carrying or selling of food items, plate for eating, drinking cup, plate/object for frying garri and house decoration. The origin of calabash could not be traced to any place or country. But if calabash is really an American tree as Ozigbo stated above, what then served the above stated functions for our people in the traditional past? Njoku (2015) states that "calabash has been a common material in any African society". It was among the first crops that man cultivated and they are easy to maintain. This could be exactly the reason why calabashes were conventionally used in the past by indigenous craftsmen. So, the idea that calabash is an American tree is not supported by other scholars such as Njoku (2015) who earlier states that calabash is a material commonly used in Africa. But one can assume that the material is a versatile tree or crop that can grow easily in several geographical environments.

Onumuorahoya (2003) posits that "calabashes are fruits which are not edible but serve several purposes in the home". Here, Onumuorahoya understood only the domestic

values of calabash. But Ogumor (2007:14) stresses:

Decorated Calabashes are now used to decorate homes and as musical instruments such as xylophones. In the republic of Benin, calabash is specially decorated and traditionally used as gift item from a young man to the girl he wants to marry. Every design found in such calabash symbolizes a proverb and are read as love letters. For instance, the design that uses snake as the motif means that even if a serpent attacks you, I will cut off its head and so would I kill any rival. The curly tailed chameleon means that “Mawalisu, (the moon goddess and sun) will see that all goes well as the marriage takes place. The motif of “Go bird” means that it is so easy for the first to go into the big beak of the ‘Go’ as for a man to take the woman who likes him. The motif of an eye means that your heart should be soft so that my eyes may always gaze at you”. The cross-shaped design interprets that by the grace of “Mawu” we will do what we want.

Calabash whose botanical name is “*Crescentia Cujete*” is known by various different names depending on the area, or people in Nigeria. The Yoruba calls it “Igba” Housa knows it as *Duma* or *Kwarya* While the Igbo name is *Oba* and it is used by many communities in Nigeria. Oziogu (2012) reveals that the name calabash is a derivative of French word *calebasse*. In Spain it is called *calabacero*, *cuite* in Brazil, while Panama, Columbia, Venezuela and Peru knows it as *Tutumo*. In Ecuador, the object is known as *Mate*, and as well, *Huinga* in Peru, *Jicaro* in Mexico. Calabash is called *Huhu* in China, *Hyotan* or *Yugao* in Jappan, *Bak* in Korea, *Boo-thee* in Burma, *Upo* in Philippines and *Cuczza* in Italian.

In Pakistan also, the green calabash is known as *Lauki* while the yellow verity is known as *Kaddu* in Urdu part of the country.

In Bangladesh, it is called *Laa* or *Kaddu*. In Nepali, it is called *Lauka*. In Arab, it is called *Qara*. In Aramaic, it is called *Kura*. In Vietnam, it is called *Bau-canh* or *Bau-nam*. In India, calabash is used in many string instruments as resonator. Instruments that look like guitars are made of wood, but they can have calabash resonator at the end of the string table called *toomba*. Other Indian musical instruments like *kudra veena* and *cichitra veena* have two large calabash resonators at both ends of the string table. Resonator is a device for making sound louder and stronger especially in musical instruments.

Research also reveals that Baul singers of Bangal have their musical instruments made of calabash while Hinders ascetics (sadhu) traditionally used a dried gourd vessel called *Kamandalu*. In Costa Rica calabash is called *Guacal*. In traditional African society, this object (Calabash) is processed to produce house hold utensils like bowls, cups and water/wine containers. It is also known for its religious and socio-cultural values especially in Igbo cultural dance where its artistic role presents a dynamic expressive genre that begs to be more highlighted in our generation. The ability of Calabash to serve as musical instrument in traditional Igbo society where it produces musical sounds that blend the sound of other musical instruments seems to have been forgotten by African scholars. Igboamazu (2015) in his “Egedege Dance: A genre in Igbo land for cultural rebirth” understands this fact when analyzing the cultural ingenuity in Egedege cultural dance and unveiling the significant roles of calabash rattling instrument in such entertaining cultural display of the Igbo.

Selz (1981:376) in his book “Art in Our Times: A Pictorial History 1890-1980” for example, made it clear in describing the two traditions that continued to function for the expression of basic sculptural forms in 1940s. The two traditions were termed “organic and geometric” which a female artist Barbara Hepworth was highly rated among other artists. This is simply because she was able to show almost perfect synthesis of the two traditions which is evident in her work “Polagos” of 1946. The aim of the artist was however; to infuse the formal perfection of geometry with the vital grace of nature hence she succeeded with a dynamic configuration of spiral volume mounted on a grain of wood. But the concern of this

study is not just on the grain of wood, rather, the literary work was brought under review because of the symbolical similarity found in the technique of production which finally resulted to a cut or pierced painted object that gives a great sense of concavity and depth which presumably, (the object) is a calabash or its symbolism.

The gourd family of flowering plants belonging to the cucurbitales contains 118 general and 854 species of food and ornamental plants. Most members of this family of warm climate annual crop benefits from sunny location and fertile well-drained soil. The family includes such economically important food plants as pumpkin, cucumber, gherkin, water melon, summer squash, winter squash, cayote, cassabanana, squash and other gourds. Most of the hollow-shelled edible fruits are grouped with gourds to cucubitacea family and this surprises Mbadimma (2011:9) who asserts in his “Production of Sculpture Using Calabash: A Visual Essay on Oil Spillage;”

Surprisingly... Calabash fruit may be cooked as squash or served in stews, soups or stir-frys. The roasted seeds of calabash are used to make the traditional Central American drink horchata. The seed are cooked in sugar, brightly coloured and solid as sweets in addition to the fruits, the leaves shoots, and tendrils, the calabash plants are also edible.

For the purpose of this study, both gourd and calabash are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. In most African societies, Calabash can be decorated using various techniques or methods in accordance with the tradition of an area. Some people still use calabash as they are by simply washing them regularly. While in decoration, the carvers change the simple look of the calabash to a complicated design using various motifs and ornamentations. Some of the techniques used for calabash decoration are scraping, carving and scarification as well as painting. Sometimes these methods are combined.

Scraping is the technique that involves the use of a sharp knife which sometimes has a serrated edge which is used to scrap off the pattern motifs to some depths. Ozigbo (2012) in *Vanguard News* reports that “Fulani women carvers may rub chalk into the scraped area as the background area is carefully scrapped away, then the pattern stands out in the natural colour of the skin of the calabash against a white background”.

Another method is carving. It is the use of lines which are incised with sharp knife. Here, the carver/decorator makes as many incisions as possible to decorate the calabash both inside and outside. This is also called “cutting” or “scarification” The carvers normally place their knives over a fire and when the knives are red-hot, they use them to design on the calabash.

Concept of *Uli* Design

Uli design is a form of writing and among the Igbo heritage that suffered from the influence of western culture. *Uli* motifs was also explored in this study because it is a value that begs to be highlighted in our generation. Motifs for *Uli* design are generally derived from nature with no attempt to copy nature. Rather nature is being abstracted and transmuted into art. Igbo art (*Uli*) concerns itself more with the problem of design as against those of illustration or narrative. Spontaneity is another attribute of Igbo painting and drawing. According to Igboamazu (2011:10):

An expert is regarded as one who is able to put down quickly and confidently the various elements of the picture. *Uli* in Igbo culture is specifically a body art which involves the application of decorative motifs or designs on the body in form of painting and marking for modification and alteration of parts of the body. These motifs or designs are derived from objects which surrounds us. Some of them are imbued with rhythm while some are inspired by plants, animals and human activities while others are inspired by the action of nature. These motifs are always modified and applied to the body in form of linear, bold, geometric

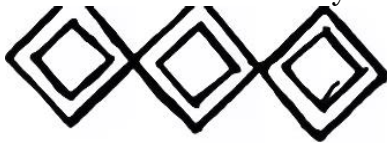
and stylized shapes to emphasize and enhance the beauty of the bearer. *Uli* body decoration was an art form practiced by Igbo people, an exclusive of women especially the traditional potters whose wares were very richly adorned with free hand drawing of *Uli* design. The female *Uli* designers also use *Uli* which is the liquid extract of the *Uli* fruit to make beautiful patterns on bare bodies during ceremonies. This exclusive practice of Igbo women has become the adoption employed by Igbo traditional door carvers, metal workers and many other areas of art and local craft whose discard of their masculine ethos to adopt *Uli* motifs into their arts can be viewed as a great change of orientation.

This research employs *Uli* design to embellish calabash used as a sculptural medium so that the old heritage will definitely meet the exigencies of the time. The ability to explore the images and symbols of the *Uli* in this creative process is what the New Culture Viewpoint (1979:2) describes as “creating in traditional freedom”. *Uli* is the highest point of Igbo design. Every single motif is highly symbolic and communicates an idea.

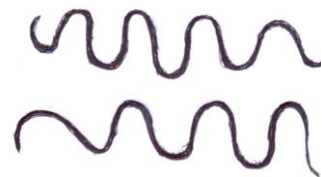
According to Igboamazu (2011:24-28) in his study entitled “Contribution of Iconography in Improving Metal Work in Awka” the sinuous curvilinear and geometric shapes which have specific names derived from natural and animal forms include the following:

Organic (Animal) Forms: Isinwangwere

Reptiles are richly used in Igbo folklore. The lizard occupied such important position in their folklores that they are depicted in designs thus:



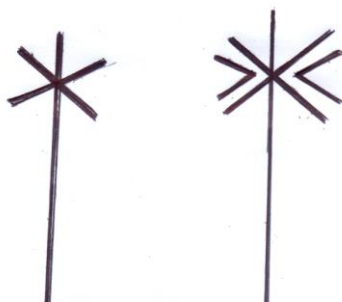
(fig.12) Isinwangwere. Source: Igboamazu (2011).



(fig.14) Ijenwagwo. Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Aguno

Wall gecko is also represented in design.



(fig.13) Aguno. Source: Igboamazu (2011).

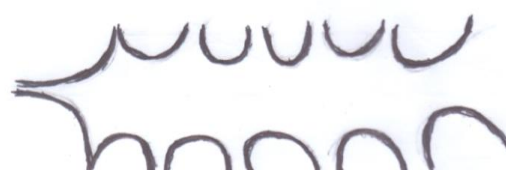
Okpanwobogwu

Birds are also represented in design, the duck thus represented in graphic form.



(fig.15) Okpanwobogwu. Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Another variation is the one in which the movement of the duck is depicted with its print as it waddles.



(fig.16) Okpanwobogwu. Source:

Ijenwagwo

Design derived from the zig zag movement of snake.

Onunwanunu

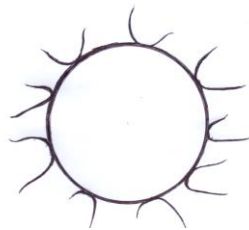
A derivation from the shape of the heads of birds is thus depicted



(fig.17) Onunwanunu. Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Ulinwebe

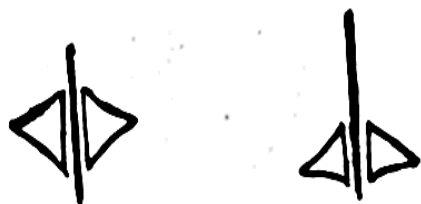
A design connected to yam, the chief crop of the Igbo with the beetle curiously the symbol.



(fig.18) Ulinwebe. Source: Igboamazu (2011)

Ukukolobuba

The butterfly (ukukolobuba) thus represented.



(fig.19) Ukukolobuba, Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Ulimgbuli

The tadpole is depicted with a full drop motif.



(fig.20) Ulimgbuli. Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Nvoagu

The claws of a lion.



(fig.21) Nvoagu. Source: Igboamazu (2011)

Plant derived forms

Series of beautiful designs are derived from the features of the environment and daily happenings of the traditional experience. A popular design here is Agwolagwo. A concentric circle which is a symbol of wealth and it is a representation of yam from its tendrils. Yam is the people's chief crop. The design has acquired many varieties as it passes from one artist to another.



(fig.22) Agwolagwo. Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Ishinwoji.

Another outstanding design is the ishinwoji derived from kola nut. It is a symbol of accommodation and has acquired varieties.



(fig.23) **Ishinwoji.** Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Inorganic derived forms.

One of these forms is **mkpuukwu** which is the design used in the body decoration of a girl who has just undergone the fattening period and ready for marriage. The design is used to show beauty and has been used in the embellishment of objects.



(fig.24) **Mkpuukwu.** Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Uli Ochichi is another design which symbolizes strength and vitality and is used during wrestling periods

(fig.25) **Uli Ochichi.** Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Uli Mkpachi: This is a symbol of beauty

and youth. It is also the representation of pot used for preparation of soup.



(fig.26) **Uli Mkpachi.** Source: Igboamazu (2011).

Nhoite

Nhoite is employed for decoration. It is a representation of utensil used in bringing down from fire pots of food. It shows ceremonies and moment of ample feeding.



(fig.27) **Nhoite.** Figures 12-29, uli motif popularly adopted by Awka metal workers.. Source: Igboamazu (2011)

Calabash as a Medium for Art Production

The concept of calabash installation however, shoots from necessity to explore the possible uses of calabash, which its domestic functions has virtually become obsolete, reinvent it through installation, and also present the idea to post-modern artists who are ever sourcing for new media of expression. Nwanna (2014:43) in his "Awka Traditional Architecture: Its context and reality" described calabash as "objects used for frying garri or as ordinary receptacle for water containers". The reason why Nwanna sees calabash as "ordinary receptacle..." could be based on the fact that the use of calabash for utilitarian purposes has almost been replaced by plastic products and its use for art production confined to traditional art. This project explores and reinvents calabash as a material for modern art production and by way of installation has improved its utility relevance.

According to Hindebrand (2019) in his article entitled *Calabash Art* unveiled that some American artists has used calabash for art production. An example is, Nurettin Taskaya who exhibited a carved calabash sculpture featuring an animal (Tiger) on the surface. Also, France Benoit in the year 2008 according to the same article, combined calabash and fabric to form a free standing decorative sculpture. But the works by these American artists were limited to a simple decorative craft. This project has added to it thus calabashes were radically used to produce sculptures that demonstrates functionalism and as well, conceptual.

According to Mbadimma (2011), calabash has not made much impact in Nigerian art

as a sculptural medium, rather people employ it for utilitarian purposes and simple decorative craft. Even the artistic uses of calabashes for decorative purposes are viewed as part of our national heritage". Mbadimma therefore, explored and elevated the use of calabash from mere decorative craft to conceptual idioms for interrogating the ills of oil spillage in Nigeria. He artistically presented calabash as a good medium for conceptual art. Conceptual art is the kind of art in which ideas are paramount and the form that realizes the ideas is secondary. His work was specifically anchored on conceptual art though, limited to aesthetics, the work addressed the ills of oil spillage in Niger Delta while this study differs in focus, since its target is to address the political, social, economic and environmental concerns/natural phenomenon such as flood disaster, recent global corona virus pandemic etc. Apart from thematic difference from Mbadimma's project, this research employs mainly assemblage methods to achieve several reliefs and free standing sculptures that also vary from Mbadimma's work in style.

Onuzulike (2005) singled out again, the calabash sculpture of Uchechukwu Onyishi in his paper entitled *Idiom of Difference: The Promoter of Nigerian Art Exhibition....* returning from the general to the specific, one was compelled to follow Uchechukwu Onyishi's battalion of ants or termites, numbering about 150 which crawled busily in a file through a substantial length of the exhibition hall. Crafted with rusty metal wires and rods with black *kpurukpu* seed and bone-dry calabashes gathered from around the bushes of his Nsuka country home. Onyishi's variable installation addressed the issue of military dictatorship (or invasion) in Nigeria. The military in general are destructive in action but follow a well-regimented command structure like the termites or ant. Still, according to the literature, the context in which the (installation) destructive creatures were exhibited appeared to be a veiled idiom subtly commenting on the new found democracy in Nigeria. It could be that Onyishi with the calabash sculpture focused on the remains of the Nigerian military dictators who were on their way out of the political scene at that time of the exhibition. Perhaps, in the calabash installation, the creatures crawled along the scene with a holistic presence, marching with a seemingly innocuous mien as though they never hurt. The installation ants/termites by Onyishi relates to this project somehow in the medium, technique and more importantly, both sculptures remains a conceptual statement capable of a wide range of meaning. However, there are still great differences in the focus of the two calabash installations. Though each of the sculptures represents a crowd, Onyishi's installation displayed a crowd of ants/termites which symbolizes the military action. The installation in this project attempts displaying a crowd of abstracted human figures in protest.

Adepegba (1986) in his *Decorative Arts of Fulani Nomads* designs calabash (bowl) focused on various abstract motifs like circles, squares, triangles and lines. The works produced here are ordinary receptacle or containers for selling food items which all serve utilitarian purposes. But the reality which no one could doubt remains that the use of calabash for utilitarian purposes has almost been replaced by plastic products and its use for art production confined to traditional art. This project explores and reinvents calabash as a material for modern art production and has improved its utility relevance. Installation with calabash in this project closes such gap and elevates the use of calabash from traditional arts to modern sculptures that meet with exigencies of the time, dissolving the ethos of antiquity into the rhythm of our contemporary oeuvre of functional sculptures. Okodo (2013:104-106) demonstrates the cultural ingenuity of the Igbo people in his article entitled *Igbo traditional instruments of music*, He stated;

Rattlers are one of the traditional Igbo musical instruments that involves weaving. One type of rattler which is produced with calabash is maracas. Its Igbo name is ***Ichaka***. It is produced by weaving beads over a calabash. When the object is shaken, the striking of the beads on the gourd would produce good musical sounds. The instruments therefore serve

their primary need of contributing to music making. The music they produce are matters of cultural identity to the people. The instruments too signify the Igbo culture. Even when they are placed without playing, whoever sees them knows their environment of origin.

However, calabash performs all these dynamic roles in Igbo traditional music making and entire African culture, but there is not record of attempts to use it for assemblage for sculpture composition. Rather, the symbols and decorative motifs were all applied to other techniques of sculpture production. This study has creatively achieved sculptures and further popularized the use of calabash as a sculptural medium.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Sustainability

We live in an era where sustainability is a word we encounter at every turn. Our planet and it's human inhabitants have begun to feel the complex effects of climate change, caused primarily by human activities with negative impacts that fall disproportionately on those least able to mitigate their effects (Stocker, 2014). As the result of heavy use of fossil fuel-based energy, agricultural methods that rely on deforestation, and a world economic system driven by ever-increasing consumption and waste of physical resources, we face enormous challenges in the supply of energy, water, renewable resources, and non-renewables such as minerals as well as with extensive and far-reaching environmental degradation like the acidification of our oceans and a dramatic loss of biodiversity (Winston& Cupchik, 1992). The theories of sustainability attempts to prioritize and integrate social responses to economic and cultural problems. In its literal rudiments, sustainability is viewed as the capacity to maintain some entity, outcome, or process over time. Ajator, Emoh & Okolie (2015:35) stress that the word "sustainable implies forever, perpetuity, constant rebirth and renewal, an inexhaustible system". An analogous use of the term "sustainability" refers to dependent social conditions; for example, a peace treaty, an economic policy, or a cultural practice may be called sustainable if it will not exhaust the support of a political community. Sustainability is the process of maintaining change in a balanced environment, in which exploitation resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspiration. The theories are relevant to this study because this changing world needs artists/sculptors that think and demonstrate sustainability in their approaches towards creation of works that promote conservation of cultural values and reinvention of outmoded economic resources. According to Mustapha (2019:16), "Nigerian societies are bedeviled with myriads of challenges which hinder the sustainable growth and development. So, to ensure sustainability, one has to understand the complex chain of cause and effect that flows through each system especially the social, economic and ecological".

The concept of sustainability frames also the ways in which economic problems jeopardize the healthy growth of a nation's economy and social systems. On a global scale, the political challenge of sustainability raises a set of basic problems and comprehensive goals on the dependency of industrial, economic and social systems. In this study, sustainability illuminates the mutual effects between the creative contributions of art/sculpture in the sustainable growth of the Nigeria economy especially in this era of global economic crises. This project therefore, identified, outlined and discussed four related theories that address this challenge. Those four major related theories are Environmental sustainability theory, Sustainable development, Green Economics theory and the theory of Art and sustainability

The Theory of Arts and Sustainability

Arts, through the empathetic process culturally embedded in each of its various branches communicate the real feeling, gravity, and complexity of the current problems the environment faces. Utilization of this fact will inform sustainability organizations that are working to heal the planet about the need to recognize and employ this powerful but little noticed cultural tool. Indeed, given the level of change required and the urgency associated with it, the global issues we face are so grave that the current century has been dubbed the “Environmental Century” (Mulkey, 2017) and the “Anthropocene” geologic age (Smith & Zeder, 2013). We need to add the role of culture and art to our sustainability toolkits as this theory will also argue that the arts can enhance the public’s ability to embrace and confront these complex challenges of sustainability.

The life-sustaining requirements of healthy integral ecological systems on Earth are as complex as the inter-relations of the current destructions, and changes advised as remedies for the situation are also complicated. Such complexity, moreover, is more than our current media-driven world can deliver to the public, and whatever fragments of knowledge are broadcast come to be viewed by many as quagmires to be avoided or spurned. As a result, some still do not comprehend or accept the notion of limited or finite planetary resources; fewer still understand that waste products are threatening many of the Earth’s species (including humans). Thus, while the scientific consensus is quite clear (Stocker, 2014) and the public trusts scientists more than any other social institution to provide accurate information, there is still a large gap between scientists and the public in recognizing the seriousness of the challenges we face and the urgent need for significant changes in our systems (Pew Research Center, 2015, 2016). As such, we argue here that the empathy art evokes can help close this gap. Indeed, there are too few of those who listen sufficiently to our scientists and thereby understand our sustainability challenges. As science historian Naomi Oreskes suggested, scientists need to learn better communication with the public, and the public at the same time must recognize when industry actors disseminate wrong or deceptive information disguised as science for their own profit (Oreskes, 2014; Oreskes & Conway, 2011). Psychological and political factors also contribute to a lack of adequate public response to sustainability issues. The arts, therefore, can play an important role by eliciting empathetic responses that will help individuals surmount such barriers.

As we consider how the arts may contribute to positive public engagement with sustainable solutions to environmental challenges, it will be helpful to consider what we mean by “the arts.” This term encompasses the performing arts (music, dance, theatre), visual/ conceptual arts (painting, sculpture, photography, architecture), and literary arts or literature (poetry, prose, and drama, as well as orally transmitted literature such as epics and myths). “Environmental art,” then, is most often used as the umbrella term for visual and conceptual art related to the environment, although some use the term “eco-art” as the broadest category. Environmental art includes a wide variety of artistic forms, such as site-specific performance, Eco poetry, acoustic ecology, earthworks, eco-disco, bio-art, land art, eco-theatre, green activism and many more (Bower, 2010). It can be noted, however, that art by itself can also result in what some or even all would consider as “visual pollution,” such as intrusive billboards or badly designed buildings. In this article, then, “artwork” refers to any type of art object, and, for simplicity, examples of artwork therein will be drawn largely from well-known pieces of music and visual art.

It will be instructive to describe two contrasting forms of environmental art by way of example. “Nature art,” when defined as inspiring works of art with nature as subject, is perhaps the most basic and well-known form of environmental art. Examples include Ansel Adam’s photographs of natural scenes, Mark Twain’s descriptions of the Mississippi River in *Huckleberry Finn*, and Claude Monet’s paintings of water lilies (another definition of nature art is art made from nature itself). The Nature Conservancy tells us that “nature is everywhere in art,” and that by “conserving nature, we are helping nurture our artistic

spirit.” They make the link between nature art and environmental activism as follows: “The beauty of nature reflected in art is just another reminder of our need to protect it.” Pioneered by Joseph Beuys in the 1960s, “social sculpture” is a contrasting form of conceptual environmental art which includes human activity as well as elements of social or environmental change. An example of Beuys’s innovative work dates from 1982 when he constructed a pile of stones on a German site—seen from the air, the pile showed itself to be an arrow pointing to an oak tree he planted. From the literature, the project, which specified that to remove a stone one had to plant a tree where the stone was placed, resulted in 7,000 trees being planted in the area. Beuys’s work thus demonstrates his contention that “every human being is an artist” while simultaneously and directly motivating individuals to take pro-environment actions.

Reasons and Models for Sustainability

“An economic model looks to sustain natural and financial capital; an ecological model looks to biological diversity and ecological integrity; a political model looks to social systems that realize human dignity. Agriculture, forest management, or financial investment might be deemed sustainable, meaning that the activity does not exhaust the material resources on which it depends” Umeh (2018:13).

In the area of art, this study is deemed right to be sustained especially the effort geared towards the reinvention and popularizing the use of calabash integrated with other materials in addressing modern concern. The cultural ingenuity and new values purely explored in calabash is begging for conservation. Ezennaya and Irouke (2015:129) in their article “Maintenance Outfit: A Major Driver for Sustainable Urban Development in Anambra State” Asserts: Consequent upon the hard fact that any structure erected by man can age or decay overtime, it becomes imperative that all infrastructural facility must be proved with maintenance guide-line. Sustainable of a resource achieved when a given generation that uses it to meet up with certain needs does not compromise the opportunity of other future generation making use of the same resource to meet up with their own needs. Therefore, for any resource to be sustainable, it must be maintained, and this is why maintenance is a sine qua non for the achievement of the much-desired sustainability. Therefore, unless maintenance philosophy is made a part of our daily living, sustainability will continue to elude us and remain a mirage. Ezennaya and Irouke’s work is relevant to this study hence calabash art is one of Nigeria’s art heritage that is gradually going into extinction, hence the need to popularize the art among contemporary artists for the sake of sustainability.

Sustainability and Development

Development and sustainability are areas of concern to most developing countries like Nigeria. The concept of development is viewed from different point of views by scholars, to some it implies increased skill and capability, greater freedom, creativity, self – discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Abdullahi and Sakariyu (2013) described development as involving the creation of opportunity for the realization of human potentials such as basic requirement to function properly, provision of food, employment and elimination of all kind of inequality which may lead to poverty. Abubakar (2012), Edemode (2013) and Utomi (2006), corroborated Abdullhi’s view on what development entails as they noted that development does not start with goods and services, it starts with people, their orientations, organization and discipline.

They argued that if a society is properly oriented, organized and disciplined, it can be prosperous even on the scantiest basis of natural wealth. Ajator (2015) et al mused that the word “development” connotes change, growth, expansion, production and movement. Sustainable development is that which can stand the test of time; it should meet the need of

the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. "To achieve these, four major areas that sustain development should not for whatever reason(s) be ignored. They include economy, environment, people and social equity". Dakyes and Zira (2015:105). These reviews are relevant to this study and contribute to sustainable development in the various areas of human endeavor.

Identified Gaps in Literature

The gaps which this project is set out to fill include exploring calabash as a material for post-modern art exploration, especially installation, which is relatively known to the academia. The project also aims at reinventing calabash and elevates it from traditional utility objects to objects that have contemporary utility purposes. More importantly, there is not much literature on the use of calabash for contemporary sculpture and utility. This study will also fill a gap in this area since it will document the outcome of the research in a written form.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed method research design. Explorative, experimental and survey designs were used. The research comprises of two areas: The practical and the written literary aspects; the practical aspects include production of modern Sculpture using various exploratory methods while an analysis of the outcome of the works produced were documented in a written project format.

The practical aspect of this study hinges on exploratory research design. According to Adetoro (1986), "Research design is the overall scheme or programme of research which include how research objective was achieved and how the problems encountered were tackled. It is a blueprint that sets the frame work to adequate test of relations among variables". Egonwa (2012) adds that "the production of an art piece is a problem solving as well as exploratory". The process according to him is open ended and does not have a pre-determined final point but requires a testing out of ideas until the issues explored come to some truth and understanding.

So, in the characteristics of qualitative research, this studio research explores the possible use of calabash that is now regarded as outdated material in domestic usages that meets the exigencies of the time. The focus was more on the principle of simplicity and minimalism which is the major concern of 21st century postmodern art. The symbolic use of *Uli* design on some of the works was mainly for embellishment with motifs of great cultural significance and creation of center of interest on the composition.

Area of the Study

The research was conducted in Anambra State, (see appendix 1 for map) South-east of Nigeria with capital at Awka. Anambra State has some major commercial areas which include; Onitsha, Nnewi, Ekwulobia, Igbo-ukwu and Umunze. The Population of Anambra State is 4,182,032., Nigeria has 923,768 Square kilometer of land mass and with over 170 million populations (United Nations Population Division 2018). The aim of choosing Anambra State is because few people in some rural areas in the state are still making use of calabash (especially the specie used in this research).

Population of the Study

The population of the study is 200 consisting of people selected across five major towns in Anambra State, namely; Onitsha, Nnewi, Ekwulobia, Igbo-Ukwu and Umunze.

Studio Procedure

The studio project involves different stages and approaches of execution. After gathering of the materials, the different processes and stages of the sculpture production include: Stage 1: Collection/gathering of materials, Stage 2: Processing of calabashes, Stage 3: Conception, Stage 4: Sketches, Stage 5: Construction, Stage 6: *Uli* Design/ornamentation, Stage 7: Drawing, Stage 8: Assembling/Installation, Stage 9: Finishing and Mounting.

Stage 1: Collection and Gathering of the Materials.

The researcher harvests the matured calabash fruits from the tree which were left to dry and finally stored and processed for the execution of the project.



Plate 1 shows the researcher taking the harvested calabash materials to the place of storage. This is to enable the materials get dried and ready for use in the practical project execution. Wheelbarrow were used to transport the materials to the place of storage.

Stage 3: Processing of Calabash



Plate 2: The researcher processing and brushing the calabashes using angle grinding machine fixed with round metal brush. Photo by: Nze Chinaza.

The calabashes long time storage attracted dirt and numerous unclean agents on the objects. Its surface glazy nature would not also give room for efficient gumming of these objects together. Therefore, a round wire brush was fixed in angle grinder to brush off the dirt and ensure adequate gluing of the objects together.

Stage 4: Cutting some of the calabash to various sizes and shapes

Some of those calabashes to be used were cut into small pieces without a definite shape. The aim of the Artist was to demonstrate the principles of juxtaposed variety and simplicity of forms. Hand saw was used to cut the calabash into pieces. The smaller sizes of the materials were archived by further breaking them to pieces without a definite shape.

Stage 5. Drawing for Sculpture (Preliminary Drawings)

The project being explorative, various drawings of the intended works were made on paper. Out of these drawings, some were selected by the project supervisor.

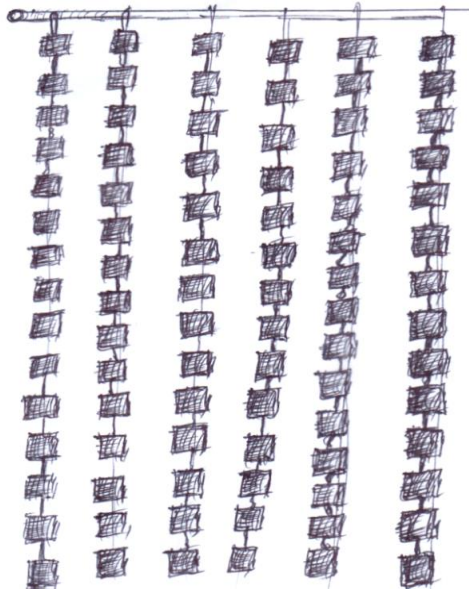


Fig. 1. Drawing for Sculpture I

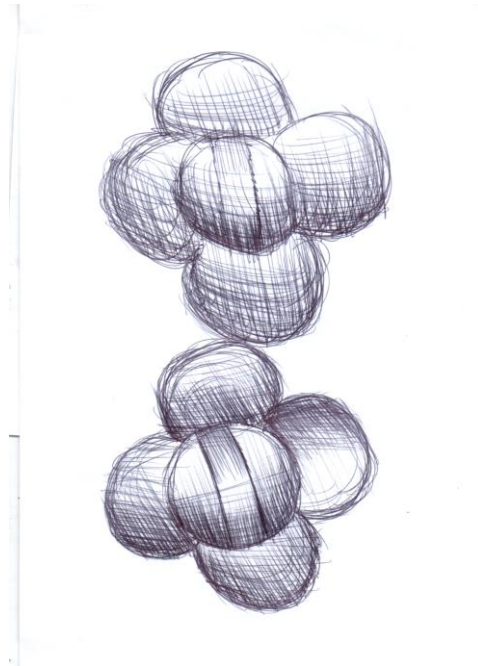


Fig. 2. Drawing for Sculpture II

Stage 6. Construction

The objects were first of all glued with small ropes for hanging and easy assemblage since top bond is not a quick drying adhesive. After two or three days (depends on the weather) the top-bond must have reasonably cured to a stage it can be managed or raised up without detachment. Then, further assemblage commences which is the gradual placement/hanging of the joint calabashes on a background.

Stage 7. Assemblage and Installation



Plate 3: The researcher assembling the calabashes. Photo by Nze Loveth.

Plate 3 shows the researcher installing the pieces of calabash to achieve a single sculptural piece.

Finishing and Mounting

Most of the sculptural pieces produced as a result of this studio project are installations that have no definite finish pattern. The finishing of such works is subject to the site where they are to be exhibited. The reason is based on the fact that those works are meant to be site-specific. Most of the works produced were relief and provisions of nails (for hanging) were made for the relief works on the background. On the other hand, metal and plastic bases were provided for some of the works to be displayed as free standing.

Materials, Tools and Equipment Used

Materials are those items consumed to form part of the work produced while tools are those implement that helped to put the materials in place. Equipment also, are the apparatus or heavy instruments used in the process of production. Below are the list of materials, tools and equipment used in course of production: Top bond, Water, Brush (soft), Metal brush, Angle grinder / filling machine, Saw, Knife, Palate knife, Car paint, Wood, Wood polish, Sprayer, Calabash, Welding machine, Wheel barrow, Measuring tape, Pincers, Sandpaper, Hog brush, Graphic brush, Hack saw.

Data Presentation and Analysis of Work

One of the major steps in a research exercise is the nature of the presentation and analysis of works rendered. Here data collected from both Primary and secondary sources are presented in a statistical form for easy analysis. Therefore, statistical techniques are employed to analyze the data to enable informed decision to be taken with respect to the area of study.

Data Presentation

For more effective presentation of data clarity and easy understanding, the questionnaire is divided into two sections via “A” for personal information of the respondents and section “B” for research questions. A total number of 210 copies of questionnaire were administered to beseech response on the subject matter being reached upon. Out of the 210 copies of the questionnaire 200 copies were returned in good condition. The copies which represent were used and presented in a tabulated form.

SECTION A: Personal information of the respondents**Table1: Sex Distribution of the Respondents**

Sex	No. of Response.	Percentage.
Male	120	60
Female	80	40
Total	200	100

Table1, indicated that the majority of the respondents were male which represented 60% (N= 120) while female amount to 40% (N= 80).

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18-28	5	2.5
29-38	14	7
39-48	36	18
49-58	60	30
59 and above	85	42.5%
Total	200	

Here, it can be observed that 2.5% of the respondents are between 18-28years, 7% are between 29-38, 18% are between 39-48years, 30% are between 49-58years. While 42.5% are above 59years and above, indicating that the highest respondents fall between 59years and above.

Table 3: Marital Status

Status	Number of responses	Percentage
Single	42	21
Married	150	75
Divorced	8	4
Total	200	100

From the table above 42 respondents represented 21% are single while 150 respondents shown by 75% are married 8 respondents represented by 4% are divorced.

Table 4: Educational Qualification

Qualification	Number of responses	Percentage
FSLC	20	10
SSCE/GCE	78	39

Diploma/OND/NCE	24	12
HND/BSC/B.A	62	31
MASTERS and above	16	8
Total	200	100

From the above table, we can see the bulk of the respondents are SSCE/GCE holders with 39%. HND/BSC/BA holders are 31% Diploma/OND/NCE holders with 12%, FSLC holders with 10% while Masters and above holders are 8%.

Table 5: Occupation of Respondents

Option	Respondents	Percentage
Student	15	7.5
Artisan	22	11
Self-employed	38	19
Trader	56	28
Civil servant	69	34.5
Total	200	100

Data in Table 5 showed that most of the respondents are Civil Servants (34.5%), followed by Traders which accounted for 28%. Respondents who are Self-employed has the response rate of 19%, Artisan has 11% while Students recorded the least which is 7.5%.

SECTION B; RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question One: How can an artist create calabash based sculptures in order to further popularize the use of calabash as a modern sculptural medium?

Table 6: Respondents View on the Possibility of Creating and Popularizing the use of Calabash as a Modern Sculptural Medium.

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	30	15
Agree	10	5
Partially Agree	22	11
Strongly Disagree	100	50
Disagree	38	19
Total	200	100

Source: Field survey 2019.

From the above table, 30 respondents representing 15% strongly agreed that it is possible to create and popularize the use of calabash as a sculptural medium, 10 respondents representing 5% also agree while 22 respondents represented by 11% partially agree. 100 respondents representing 50% strongly disagreed while 38 respondents by 19% agreed.

1. **Research Question Two:** In which way could calabash be explored to serve as commentaries for addressing contemporary socio-political problems in the society?

Table7: Respondents believe on the possible way calabash could be explored to serve as commentaries for addressing contemporary socio-political problems in the society.

Options	Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	30	15
Agree	40	20
Partially Agree	15	7.5
Strongly disagree	70	35
Disagree	45	22.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Here 30 respondents by 15% strongly agreed there is possible way calabash could be explored to serve as commentaries for addressing contemporary socio-political problems in the society. 20% (N=40) agree, 7.5% (N=15) partially agree, 35% (N=70) strongly disagree, while 22.5% (N=45) disagree.

Research Question Three

How could the exhibited practical project in the university affect the viewers' opinion

Table 8: Respondent believe on how the exhibited practical project in the university could affect the viewers' opinion.

Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	20	10
Agree	40	20
Partially Agree	20	10
Strongly disagree	75	37.5
Disagree	45	22.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field survey 2019.

Table 8 reveals that 20 respondents representing 10% strongly agreed that the exhibited practical project in the university can affect the viewers' opinion, while 40 respondents (20%) agreed. However, 20 of the respondents representing 10% were indifferent. 75 respondents (37.5%) strongly disagreed while 45 respondents (22.5%) disagreed.

Practical Project Analysis.

This chapter raises a critical discussion and analysis of the sculptures hence the project is a studio based exploration which attempts to redefine calabash using the modern sculptural approach. The organic sculptures realized from the studio exploration comprises of both relief and free-standing compositions addressing our environmental concerns. The sculptures were categorized and thematically analyzed to enable the reader comprehend them without several discrepancy or any form of ambiguity. Since the project aims at addressing environmental worries, the works are all variations on environmental themes. But for more clarification and further breakdown of the subjects, these works on environmental concerns will be thematically discussed based on their various contributing factors. Those factors are as follows:

- a. works based on natural phenomenon, b. scientific factors, c. socio-cultural factors and d. political factors.

A Sculpture on Natural Phenomenon

a. Heavy downpour (plate 12.)

“Heavy downpour” is an installation done by threading small pieces of calabashes to long ropes capturing a scene of heavy rain fall. The work reflects on the risk in which nearly a quarter of a million households in Nigeria face as a result of heavy rains, flooding. Flood is a large body of water in areas where it becomes destructive and impedes the natural cycle of living organisms. A flood may be the result of long period of heavy rain, or rivers or lakes that have over flown their banks. Heavy flood can be so disastrous that infrastructures are washed away, drowning people and animals drown, and people can be stranded for long periods. The society and the economy of the country suffer in many ways after the flood. The loss of lives, vegetation, and infrastructure means there will be fewer people on labor force, less agriculture available for the locals and exportation, and fewer businesses to contribute to the economy of the country.

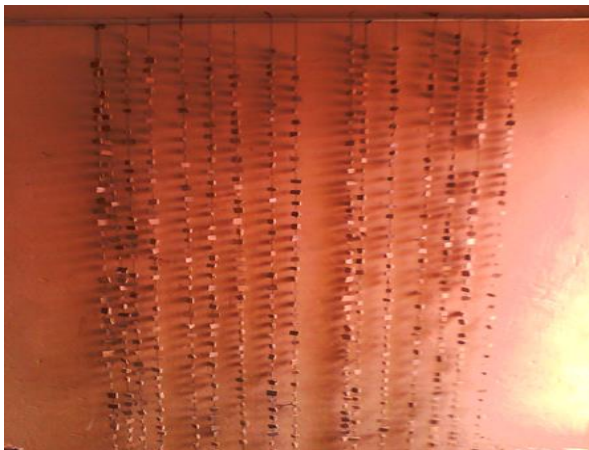


Plate 4: “Havy Downpore” by Nze Alex, 8ft x20ft.

This natural phenomenon in Nigeria also results in mass dislocation of people, many people were left homeless and jobless. Flood which is a natural event becomes a natural hazard because of human settlement close to rivers. As the environmental agency monitors rivers and issues warnings via newspaper, TV, radio and internet this work therefore, is a sculptural commentary on such natural disaster.

Sculptures based on Scientific Factors.

In the first months of the year 2020, a pandemic overwhelmed the entire world. Covid-19 commonly known as Corona virus, spread from China and created a severe public health emergency across the globe. According to an electronic source, this deadly scientifically generated health and environmental issue ravaging the entire globe might have leaked from a Chinese laboratory - CBS News (2023). The controversial theory first emerged early on the pandemic and was promoted by then US president Donald Trump suggested that the virus escaped accidentally or otherwise from a laboratory in the central Chinese city of Wuhan where the virus was first recorded. Some suggested also, that it could have been

engineered as a possible biological weapon. On 30th of January 2020, the Director General of World Health Organization (WHO) declared the corona virus disease (covid-19) outbreak to be a general public health emergency of international concern under the International Health Regulations (2005). This work therefore, is a sculptural commentary of covid-19 pandemic from a global perspective (see plate 13). The researcher explored and possibly juxtaposed calabash as a concrete metaphor describing the public health emergency with focus on the enormous impact on global economic as world trade, tourism capital flows, remittances and commodity prices have all been affected by effort to contain the virus. The work depicts calabashes arranged in a row with some wrapped with nose guards which become synonymous with the disease. Covid has almost disappeared in Africa and most parts of the globe except China and few other countries. This leads to credence to the theory that the disease might have emanated from China.



Plate 5: “Covid 19: A Global Pandemic” by Nze Alex, 16inches x 64inches.

In response to WHO directives, the researcher through the studio exploration of calabash for modern sculpture advances relief sculptures to advocate the need for safety consciousness amidst of the global pandemic. Small pieces of calabash were randomly placed on the half-cut calabashes at the background to exaggerate the deadly nature of the virus which lead to global shutdown of most human activities in the year 2020. The bigger ones were placed on the three pieces on the background with fabric-face masks placed on them.

The Sculpture based on Socio-cultural Factors.

c. Nigeria: A Scene of Carnage.

The “A scene of carnage” is the sculptural response to various forms of brutality and barbarism experienced in Nigeria as a result of mans inhumanity to his fellow man. The work was achieved by attaching short ropes of the small pieces of calabash installed on a wooden background. The ropes are attached for easy hanging and also symbolize the suicidal death and massacre of innocent people in Nigeria. Unprecedented deaths are recorded almost every day in the country due to insecurity. The work consists of small pieces of calabash that are randomly installed on a background to capture a scene of devastation among Nigerian Citizen. On each unit of the entire composition, *Uli* designs were symbolically drawn to embellish the pieces of calabash. The symbolism and cultural meaning of the *Uli* design employed on the sculpture has been interpreted in chapter three

of this project. For example, *uliochich* which is the symbol of authority which was applied on the sculpture symbolize the countless number of noble people who are victims of kidnapping, road accident, attacks by unknown gun men and other forms of violence.

Apart from using the *Uli* motifs, some other motifs of great symbols were also applied to highlight other areas of the national disaster. In all, one can describe “a scene of carnage” as a visual summary of all aspects of environmental misfortune in Nigeria as a result of ignorance and bad governance.



Plate 6: “the scene of Carnage” by Nze Alex. 8ft x 24ft.

Prominent among the motifs in the work is the “cattle motif” which symbolizes countless number of Fulani herdsmen carnage. The motif of “cross” symbolizes the anti-Christian sentiments in Nigeria perpetuated by Boko haram insurgency in northern Nigeria. It also comments on the large number of people killed by these terrorists in series of attacks in northern Nigerian states. The motif of cars was also used to incorporate ideas of contemporary life. Consequently, travelling by road becomes a dangerous and life-threatening exercise. “Scene of Carnage” (plate 14) is the conceptual documentation of road fatality, brutality, molestations of innocent citizens by the police and many other carnage in Nigerian due to bad governance. It is a visual advocacy for positive change.

Sculpture Based on Political Factor

d. Bloody Protest (plate 16):

Increasingly, Nigerian government is failing to recognize the right of citizens to protest when necessary. The current Nigerian state of insecurity and incessant killing of innocent citizens has posed fear on the people’s will to protest against government policies. Against this background, the potential of art as an information tool or platform to protest wrong social values, checking and highlighting unhealthy events in the

society. There is no doubt saying that the visual presentation of “Bloody Protest” (see plate 16) should be viewed as visual opportunity to highlight circumstances and events that challenge the Nigeria political system.

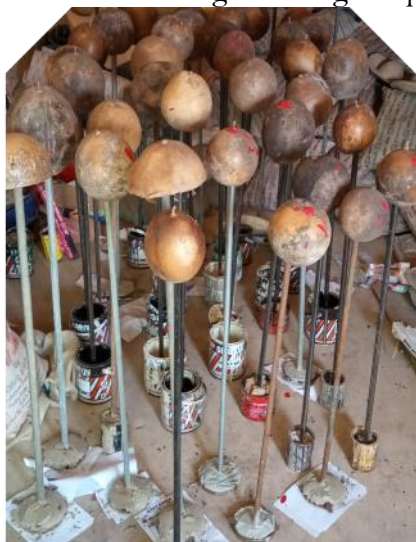


Plate 7. View 1.



Plate 8. View 2.

“Protest” by Nze Alex

“Bloody Protest” (plate 7), is full of political undertones with emphasis on the negative consequences of administrative wrong doings. The work consists of a procession, represented by mounted calabashes showing an impression of mass movement. The work provides an insight into a nation’s political instability. The whole composition followed the principle of minimalism and truthfulness to the material of production to draw people’s attention to the didactic message. A closer observation of the entire figures reveals that most of the heads were stained with blood, capturing the subject matter “bloody protest”.

In the work “Bloody Protest” calabashes were manipulated into a unique installation that displays a good sense of balance and unity of design. The work is reminiscent of the action of the police and army brutality against peaceful protesters at Lekki, shooting them at sight on October, 2020 as Nigerian Army opened fire on peaceful End SARS protesters in Lekki toll gate in Lagos State. This work therefore, is a visual commentary of such man’s inhumanity to man and many other unprecedented killings of peaceful protesters in Nigeria.

Summary

In the course of this study, different sizes of a particular specie of calabash were explored and successfully turned into aesthetically pleasing sculptures. The major techniques of producing these sculptures are joining, assembling and construction. The installation pieces consist of partly painted calabash pieces decorated with various *Uli* motifs and design, some works adhered faithfully to the colour of the material. Here the medium, calabash was given a modern touch through an inter-play of local and modern ideology which finally resulted into three dimensional configurations of volumes. The style employed in the rendition of forms is abstraction while the technique used throughout the production was installation. *Uli* designs were employed for embellishment of the calabash sculpture to give it a cultural meaning.

On the process of the exploration, new values were rediscovered in calabash for modern sculpture, opening a new sculpture window and, presenting calabash as a possible

material for sustainable economic growth. Before selecting calabash as the medium for this sculptural project, researchers considered the aesthetic and economic potency of calabash which is considered outmoded and explored the possibility of reinventing it to make it contemporarily relevant. The forms of the selected pieces of calabash suggests a number of features forming a thematic configuration and /or forms. Experimenting with the selected pieces of calabash has also turned an interesting idea for addressing contemporary societal issues. In olden days, our fore-fathers made judicious use of calabash both in domestic and as home décor. Those craft men who specialized in calabash decoration were considered rich and successful. But now, things have drastically changed. What calabashes were used for in the past has been abandoned in favor of foreign metals and plastic materials. The research also gathered that calabash is virtually subjected to unconventionality and outdated due to the influence of western culture and sufficient effort is not yet channeled to redefine and popularize it as a medium for sculpture that meets with exigencies of the time. The study therefore employs a studio practice-led methodology to visualize the idea conceived, thus elevating the material from traditional utility objects to objects that have contemporary value.

Conclusion

Contemporary Nigerian sculptors have explored waste materials extensively, bringing to lime-light, the ability of art to address current environmental challenges through series of reinvention and total transformation of waste materials to aesthetic wealth. Therefore, calabash which is an organic and unconventional material can also be explored among the contemporary Nigerian sculptors to achieve the same purpose. There is not much literature on the use of calabash for contemporary sculpture and utility. This study will also fill a gap in this area since it will document the outcome of the research in a written form. One among many other findings of this study reveals that the *Uli* traditional designs, being designs of the past are suitable for installation and calabash sculpture embellishments by giving them indigenous identity. This project shows concrete evidence of continuity and progression in this genre of visual art especially now some people are yet to consider calabash as an art material. The installation of calabash will raise a new zeal and interest in the use of this unconventional sculptural material for modern sculpture design. This study will also help modern artists to see new values in calabash and use them as modern sculpture materials.

Findings

Based on the findings of this study, the following are the conclusion of this study:

- The out- come of the studio exploration of calabash for modern sculpture shows that
- calabash which its domestic functions have become obsolete can be reinvented to achieve sculptures that can appeal to contemporary audience.
- The use of calabash as a material for addressing modern and environmental concerns using sculptural approach is therefore a possible idea.
- Since there is not much literature on the use of calabash for contemporary sculpture and utility. This study will fill a gap in this area hence it will document the outcome of the research in a written form.

Recommendations

1. Contemporary Nigerian artists should explore more and exhibit organic sculptures especially the calabash to popularize it and refresh its appreciation from the public.

2. *Uli* motif/anthology should be more emphasized in contemporary Nigerian art hence it is a culture that needs to be sustained.
3. Having explored calabash as a possible material for modern sculpture, this study therefore recommends that government and policy makers should see the need to formulate policies that promotes Nigeria cultural relics in order to revive public appreciation for the medium.
4. Government should also organize competition for reinvention of unconventional /outmoded cultural media. This will help young artists to formulate creative ideas and possibly use calabash in creating sculptures that meet with the exigencies of time.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study has contributed to knowledge in the following ways:

1. The study provided a template for further studies on organic sculptures especially calabash as one of African traditional forms that can be explored for sculpture using modern ideologies.
2. The study has confirmed the fact that calabashes can be used to produce sculptures that address contemporary challenges.
3. From the available literature reviewed for the purpose of this studio research, there is not much evidence of out-door installation of calabash in Nigeria. This study has closed such gap and proved that calabash could be a durable sculptural medium.
4. The *Uli* motifs which is one of the cultural values that is gradually going to extinction was applied for the embellishment of the calabash sculptures has been more highlighted in our generation to aid their sustainability.
5. Finally, the study has provided a data base of knowledge for further research in related fields of study.

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