

REINVENTING WASTES AMONG NIGERIAN ARTISTS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

¹Oligbinde, Samuel Rotimi, ²Ofil Emmanuel Jebechi, ³Orienvwen Kevwe Precious & ⁴Urien Ijeoma Felicia

¹Department of Art and Design, The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria

^{2,4} Department of Fine Art and Industrial Design, Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro, Delta State.

³Department of Fisheries, Delta State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Delta State Nigeria.

Abstract

Recently, the exploration of waste objects has drawn attention globally, especially among artists who are exploring different waste for artistic purposes. The demand for products made of non-degradable properties is high and this increases waste in the environment. This study however focuses causes of wastes in the environment, effects and waste upcycling strategies and ideologies as a way of combating the problem of waste pollution in the environment. The paper explores deeply into exemplary works of art and artist exploring various types of material waste as a creative means of expression. A qualitative method of research was employed. The primary data were gotten from personal interaction with health specialist and different artists at large while secondary data are gotten from e-journals, publications, project thesis, internet and articles.

The study also reveals that until there is a global change in the ideology of waste disposal, the world will continue to endure the challenges of waste pollution in our environment

Keywords: *Wastes, Recycling, Contemporary Art, Aesthetics, Waste Management*

Introduction

It is no longer news that waste is a global issue affecting all society of the world. As a result, waste management strategies are fast becoming the responsibilities and concerns of environmentalists who are concerned about protecting the environment. To conquer waste pollution, various strategies are being put in place to curb or reduce the negative impact of human waste on both the built and natural environment. To understand these strategies, there is need to understand both the ideological and material definition of waste (Ajiboye, 2012). The Macmillan English dictionary defined waste as the failure to use something valuable in an effective way. It goes on to describe waste as the useless materials, substances or parts that are left after you use something. So, upon these two definitions of waste is our premise of waste reinvention among 21st century Nigerian Artists.

The first definition above explores the idea that the material termed waste as first, a product of our ideology before it becomes the physical substance. The definition makes it possible to argue upon the premise that to think that the usefulness of an object ceases at a stage of its existence is the root of all human waste (Aderogba, 2012). When you fail to totally consume a substance the outcome would be waste. The second definition could be seen as a consequence of the latter. To fail to use objects or substances to its full capacity is what makes one believe that its remnant is useless and worthy of being termed waste.

Truly, the concept of reinventing waste revolves around what is and what waste is not. To reinvent means to change something that already exists and give it a different kind of purpose or value. The concept of reinventing waste is beyond the act of just recycling reusing or repurposing waste. It is a forward-thinking concept of practice devised by environmentalists who are foremost visual artists of various world societies. The ideology centres first on identifying that waste pollution is a common challenge to all societies' environment. It therefore, seeks an idea-creative means of solving this common challenge.

Reinventing waste is a new material activism by renowned visual artists who not only use waste medium as their means of expression, but through their creative expressions are vigorously renewing the value in abandoned, unused and disposed objects termed waste (Folorunso, 2010). This will in turn liberate the society from a waste friendly ideology. Reinventing waste seeks to encourage a society who believes that consuming the content in a package does not leave the package useless, but putting the package itself into a creative or explorative use.

We can commonly agree that wastes were formally functional products/items or at least part of items, which facilitated the daily affairs of man, but in his built environment. Wastes were used up in the different aspect of man's environment, both in the structural and interior design of construction and architecture, in our domestic homes, in manufacturing and industry, in mining, in education as in schools, in health as in hospitals. And the list of the sources of waste grows on and on. In simple terms, wastes are generated from all sectors of man's environment.

“However, concerns about usage and disposal are diverse and includes accumulation of waste in landfills and in natural habitats, physical problems for wildlife resulting from ingestion or entanglement in plastic, the leaching of chemicals from plastic products and the potential for plastics to transfer chemicals to wildlife and humans” (Richard *et al.* 2019). That is while recycling of wastes product promotes utilization of waste which helps to conserve the environment, human health and wildlife. Going by this view and understanding the problem of waste generation, one would realize that generation of waste would not be solved without consciously managing waste.

Statement of the Research Problem

Waste pollution is one of the biggest killers in the world and it is growing annually. One of the major problems of the improper disposal of wastes in the environment is that it causes various health issues. When these wastes are not properly discarded they affect the ecosystem and the environment. The world is beginning to express concern over rising amounts of wastes. The environment is the social, economic and cultural spine of the country. The study of waste pollution is still in its beginning stage. Recently, wastes of different products are repurposed and explored in art thus providing a new medium while it also reduces the amount of waste in the landfills.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to study waste pollution in the environment and how different Nigerian Artists have been able to reinvent and explore this waste in works of art. The objectives are:

- i. to study what kind of work and messages the artists uses this works to convene.

Significance of the Study

This paper helps people to see another meaning to waste. It helps people to appreciate how artists are tirelessly turning the environment into a conducive place to live in by reducing the numbers of wastes been generated in the environment. It also helps to build up creativity in people and reading meanings to every found waste in the environment. Who are the persons that could benefit from the research.

Literature Review:

Effect of Waste Pollution in the Environment

One of the problems associated with waste is that it is very hard to collect and sort into different kinds. One must not also forget that these wastes can be easily be contaminated by different materials that have toxic which means recycling them can be of great disaster to the environment especially to human health. The government is not helping the matter neither is the companies that are producing these wastes. The public on the other hand is not also cooperating on how to bring everlasting solution to this menace. Wastes are not the enemy of man, neither are they climatic saviour. Most often the public think that landfills are the ones polluting the environment but in the true sense they are not but rather regulations, especially government regulations which are not put into place or better still, no better regulation to regulate how these waste are disposed in the environment. Some of these landfills don't have protective barriers to shield the wastes from leaking and littering the environment, hence when they leak to the environment they transmit different diseases. Unfortunately, landfills are turned into residential areas, parks and event centres and so on.

Plastics are also one of the major contributor of wastes pollution in the environment. These plastics break down into synthetic tiny fibres (small particles) which cannot be seen with the normal human eyes. Scientists of recent have discovered microplastics in human vascular tissue. The study of microplastics is still in its beginning stage. Jeanette *et al.* (2023) ascertained that "micro plastics (MPs) are ubiquitous in the environment, in the human food chain, and have been recently detected in blood and lung tissues". Though records are yet to show the implications of these microplastics to the human health's but previous studies and researches have shown that it could cause stress-responses and inflammation. Though one of the major problems that has also been identified is that the presence of the microplastic in the human vein could damage the inside of the vein causing blockage or flow of blood. According to a research carried out by researchers at university of Hull, Lauren (2022), one of the researcher noted that "of the microplastics detected, there were 12 types, which have many uses and are commonly found in packaging, bottles, clothing, rope/twine, and many manufacturing processes".

Another effect of air pollution to the human health which is related to wood burning is dementia, asthma, lung disease and heart, mental illness in children and blindness. The negative impact of wood burners on the ecosystem is really a big concern for most countries. Wood burning among humans is one of the major causes of toxic air pollution in the environment. Damien (2023) elucidated that "dirty air causes thousands of early deaths a year in London alone, and 26,000 to 38,000 in

England. Wood burning has been banned in most of African and European countries due to its negative causes to human health. Urban air pollution causes nearly half of the human cancer whereby wood burning is recorded to be a sole contributor.

Light pollution is also another subject humans have not been paying attention to which is increasing steadily by the day. As light pollution grows, human light pollution also doubles the effect on human lives. There are different ways light pollution affects human life on earth. For example, bright light causes sleep disorder. "And there are a lot of documented negative health effects that come with less peaceful sleep, like increased risk of chronic disease" (Justine, 2023). Distorted light from the environment can also affect pollination by chasing insects, which along the run could affect agriculture. Hence, humans need to research on city light and when we are talking about city light, the landfills should not be left out of the picture.

Waste Exploration as a Form of Waste Management in Art

(Tenz, 2018) observed that, "waste in the environment has generated so many discussions in recent times leading to researches and project discussions to solve the problem of waste generation". Also, in the visual arts, different studies have been explored on repurposing waste and the use of waste as art media have been undertaken by many artists in the recent times.

Waste being explored as new media in art, instead of conventional media of expression, are either used for composition of images, objects, and ideas in a specific given two or three dimensional space. Several artists have experimented with various waste materials cutting them into desirable forms to create pleasing images, the likes of Moyo Okediji, Ayo Adewunmi, Nnenna Okore, Clement Adesanya, El-Anatsui, Bashorun Roqib have all executed some sculptural animal pieces in both two and three dimensions using waste medium. These art pieces prove the ability of art to turn waste to wealth, and also an option to explore on how nations can effectively manage their solid waste. With the involvement of the government initiative this will help to encourage and educate the general public on waste management. The existence of this waste in the natural environment can cause significant impacts on man, plants and animals" (Christopher *et al.* 2017). "However, as a way forward, waste material has been used by various artists in time past some of which depict socio-political issues among others to give effects and texture to their works (Nuwer, 2013).

Artists have explored various materials but some among others have restricted their works to certain styles and techniques. Adenugba used cans as a medium to produce mixed media abstract. Dairo also used plastic to produce a portrait of an African child. Mach used old coat hangers to make a huge gorilla and other wonderful art pieces, Austin Evan uses aluminum cans different sculptural pieces, Selby and Lang collected plastic trash from the beach and incorporated it into beautiful works of art, Bradford uses discarded toys to bring his idea to life, Mayer uses typewriter pieces to create human figures, Iris uses cassette tapes to create the likeness of celebrities, Reader uses metal brackets, remote control and cables satellite dishes to create magnificent works (Harness, 2012).

With the great amount of exploration of waste as art medium in the visual arts only few have written on the importance of waste exploration as art medium, while little or no document exists on the economic value of this practice to a nation's growth and development, if encouraged. However, to round it up, artists are doing a

Reinventing Wastes Among Nigerian Artists in The Twenty-First Century

great job reinventing waste as useful material in their creative fields, but the trend of waste reinvention, seeing usefulness in used or discarded objects is a philosophy that must not be limited only to the creative world. It should however extend its potentials to the other related fields of the human environment. Until this is achieved the balance of waste disposal and its appropriate management might never be met.

A New Media

Artists have numerous techniques and media for their creative expressions. However, the traditional means of expression remains the normal mode of expression. Many artists find it easy to express themselves with traditional medium and techniques, probably because of the long-time acquaintance with the medium, it usually feels natural, easy and convenient. However, the disadvantage is that it might be quite expensive to use.

The new medium here in this discuss talks about an explorative approach to making art. It is going out of the box of conventional materials to unconventional materials as art medium. The aim of the new media here is to serve as a creative field of consumption, absorption and transformation of human material waste distributing the environment into creative treasures both at an individual and national level.

Conceptual Analysis of Artists Works

Today, contemporary art recognizes artists who transform waste to art. Waste have been used by artists as a medium to create different magnificent art piece in different specialization of visual art. They have been used by various artists in time past some of which depicts socio-political issues among others to give effects and texture to their works. Artists have involved in the advocating for the upcycling of wastes materials to reduce the harmful effects in the environment. They have used wastes on a large scale severally to help solve the crisis of waste pollution by promoting the recycling.



Plate 1 :Artist: Okereke Kalu Ekpele
Title of Work: Chief Sunday Adeniyi aka King Sunday Ade
Medium: Wastes Fabric
Size: 4by6ft, 2019.
Photograph by: Oligbinde Rotimi, 2024.

Oligbinde, Samuel Rotimi, Et Al

Chief Sunday Adeniyi aka King Sunday Ade, Produced by Okereke Kalu is an exploration of waste materials for painting as a form of expression in painting. This concept is achieved by selecting some pieces of waste fabrics and combining them with the earlier mentioned materials, using them in an innovative manner to create a dynamic portrait that have a resemblance of the subject. This study is limited to the creative exploration of materials in painting. It provides detailed analysis of creative exploration of non-conventional materials in painting, with regards to the exploration of fabric wastes in achieving a desired portraiture of Chief Sunday Adeniyi Adegeye. According to Kalu in his discussion, stated that, material exploration is a broad term which refers to the use of varieties of non-conventional materials as painting medium.

The project explored textile materials that are available for mixed media painting. The painting explores the use of waste Ankara fabric with a view to providing an alternative medium for painting. The waste Ankara fabrics were sourced and collected from different tailors who would otherwise discard or burn them in the opening which is not considered to be environmentally friendly. The collected waste fabrics were sorted into different colours and cut into smaller pieces. After which the ground was prepared and the concept was transferred on it. The sorted pieces of fabric were attached to the canvas with the white glue until the canvas was filled up using the prepared colour rough as a guide.



Plate 2: Segun Adewumi,
Title of Work: Hymns of Victory
Medium: Discarded metal
Size: 30by10by10inches
Date: 2020
Photograph by: Oligbinde Rotimi, 2024.

Hymns of Victory

Working predominantly with found materials sourced from junk sites and in the city especially Lagos state, Segun Adewumi's work engages the thriving and dynamic music, culture in the city. Drawing inspiration from events like felebration (an annual festival celebrated to honour the late enigma music icon Fela Kulapokuti). Segun recognizes the role of art and music played in daily life and the way the city serves the proliferation of these artistic expressions. He is particularly interested in the durability of diverse material and the way this is mirrored in the artistic expressions and daily life of the people. He frequently expresses his artistic philosophies in upcycled media and initially attraction to sculpture because of its three dimensionality and the level of concentration that it requires.

He often draws inspiration from his vicinity, historical happenings, nature and everyday activities from which he projects his artistic concepts to have positive critical and psychological effects in the lives of others. Amid his array of talents, he has participated in several exhibitions having his works in many collections within and outside Nigeria.



Plate 3: Adedamola John,
Title of Work: Plastic Symbolism
Media: Scientific Laboratory Equipment
Size: 48by96inches
Date: 2008.
Photograph by: Oligbinde Rotimi, 2024.

Adedamola explores plastic as a medium in Painting. The painting involved the use of plastic (Ethane) media scattered around our environment as painting media. The relief work is a two-dimensional pictorial composition and creative dispositions of the plastic exploration as a medium of painting. The work encircles around Art, Science and Technology. The three cultural institutes have really helped man in the past years to establish and restructure his environment. Adedamola (2008) discusses that, “technology uses the knowledge gained from science and the creative skill supplied by art to provide things that will make life more comfortable for man”. Apart from the creative skill, he contended that Art also supplies science and technology new ideas to explore and contrive.

The painting consists of microscope, beaker, tripod stand and wire gauze, spring balance, pipette, test tube, measuring cylinder, eureka pan, round bottom flask, bell jar and band model. The microscope is used to observe very tiny objects, which cannot be seen with ordinary eyes. The beaker is used to store liquid during titration process. Tripod stand with wire gauze serves as stand during heating i.e. object/substances to be heated will be placed upon. Spring balance is used to measure weight of an object. Pipette is used to measure base during titration. Test tube is used to store and to heat liquid. Measuring cylinder is used to measure the quantity of liquid. Eureka pan is used as measuring pan in some particular experiment. Round bottom flask is used to store and measure liquid. Bell jar is used to resonate experiment. Band model may be carbon or carbon to hydrogen bond. A model used to present organic compound structure. There is also the present of a computer set at the right-hand corner for analyzes of data.

The variation of the cutting and pasting of the plastic most especially at the left side of painting shows the development technique used unlike collage or mosaic in painting. The plastics were first sorted for, cleaned and cut into different pieces. They were glued to the board with the aid of an adhesive. A sketch was first made on which the plastic was systematically placed to form each scientific laboratory equipment in picture plain. The concept and execution of the project is a fusion of artistic, scientific and technological principle.

4.1 Findings and Conclusion

Considering the challenges faced, it is important that artists cultivate creative resilience and be quick in identifying problems in their environment for therein lies ideas. The general public should be sensitized on the merit and reusing their waste, as it is economically beneficial because it provides employment opportunities in the informal sector. It is also the surest way for individuals and institutions to protect their immediate environment. This paper is a contribution to the fight against pollution generally, it's an eye opener on the possibilities and utility of what we have considered waste. It tends to be an alternative to recycling and source of creative exploration. It is a composition of inspiration, dedication, challenges and execution with the intentions of providing an alternative use for the materials rather than dumping and destroying it. It explores the various works of art by proficient artist which centres on social awareness such as immunization, polio, proper waste disposal amidst others. The paper celebrates the creative tendencies of these artists to use their work as a subject of order in today's society.

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Reinventing Wastes Among Nigerian Artists in The Twenty-First Century

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