

# African Research Review

---

*International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*

*Vol. 5 (5), Serial No. 22, October, 2011*

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v5i5.17>

---

## **Landscape Composition: Using Geometric Shapes from the Straw Medium** (Pp. 212-222)

**Enenajor, Marshall Eniwo** - Department of Fine Arts and Design,  
Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, P.O.Box 106, Uniport,  
Choba. Port Harcourt

E-mail: [marshallenenajor@yahoo.com](mailto:marshallenenajor@yahoo.com)

[www.enistraw.com](http://www.enistraw.com).

Tel: +2348033131993; +2347051553009.

### **Abstract**

*One aspect of 2D art that captures nature very quickly is the Landscape Composition. This could be expressed by artists with a barrage of mediums; most landscape compositions even as imaginative composition depicts a natural setting of a scene in any countryside. The flow of the content of the composition usually strikes the emotion of the viewer and provokes enquiries to the dexterity, skill, technique and style of the artist's control and authority over the manipulation of the common liquid mediums such as water colour, acrylic, Oil on canvas etc . This paper examines the skill and style in the application of geometric shapes cut from prepared dry stalk of cereal plant (Straw) as raw material in the making of imaginative landscape compositions.*

**Key words:** Landscape, Medium, Straw, Technique, Geometric shape, Composition.

### **Introduction**

Landscape composition is one significant aspect of 2D art that no fine art scholar can avoid in the cause of studying or practicing art. This is expressed

---

in many uncountable liquid and consumable mediums. Artists worldwide have also satisfied their expressive thirsts, abilities and capabilities by using various mediums, techniques and styles of finish for different aesthetic and iconographic purposes.

The word “Landscape” has many meanings but in this paper it is defined as in the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, International students Edition as, “everything you can see when you look across a large area of land, especially in the countryside” or, “a painting of a view of the countryside”. From artists’ point of view the content of a landscape include a progressive order of foreground (space between the artist and any object immediately in front), the middle ground (figure buildings, trees, etc) and the background which could be endless expanse of River or Sky or Vegetation. These are the components or elements in a composition and all these make up a landscape. These compositions could represent sceneries as seen by the artist on location, or made from imagination. In this paper, the artist is to create an imaginative composition of a landscape. In order to achieve this the level of view of the composition will be determined and controlled by the artist by observing the Principles of drawing, which include first, eye-view levels (above, at eye level, or below eye level). Included also are; Movement, Emphasis, Unity and Balance then “Rule of thirds”. In observing these principles or rules, an imaginative composition is seen as made from natural setting, but illusionistic (Adams, 1999).

In this paper, landscape will be examined from the style and medium of its production or execution. From ancient times different mediums have been used to express artistic compositions in 2D from organic and inorganic materials on cave walls and from different sources of colouration, Chalk, pencil, charcoal, onto modern times of water colour, pastel acrylic and oil on canvas and now the computer. With a deep misconception of what art presupposes, art produced by the use of the manufactured art medium tends to be naturalistic and realistic, that is, almost reproducing nature in colour or black/white. The natural flow of the colour and the blending of features seem more photographic. Though there have been attempts by scholars for some level of discourse as to dichotomize impressionist art from photographic realism, yet “Art” has become like “beauty” which is in the eyes of the beholder. This paper will break from this blending and flow of realistic natural colours from manufactured art mediums to a style of the synthesis of little pieces of monochromatic bits of geometric shapes from straw glued to a

surface like in Collage/ Mosaic form making a landscape composition. Impressionism will be a common factor as the combination of these geometric shapes in the progressive order will impress an illusion of the components or elements contained in a landscape.

The Straw used in this paper is one of Nigeria's grass plants. It assumes permanent colour when dry. It is then treated with fire to different monochromatic tones of deep yellow, brown onto black. The stems are shredded and cleaned-up to "paper-flat" ready for use. Though straw art is not new, it is a valuable material used in other parts of the world like Asia and the Belarus. According to Beykal (2009), the artist is a person whose approach to life has been significantly defined by a relationship to a medium such as painting or writing, hence in Nigeria the art style made from this medium had become popular, and peculiar to the author of this paper in Nigeria.

### **Essence of the study**

Though the use of different mediums for artistic expression is as old as man, exploring more materials will still continue and will experience more sophistication. According to Gilbert 1999, these different materials tend to produce particular effects. This paper focuses on the art medium called Straw with art style similar to Mixed-media. Collage, and Mosaic arts are also similar to mixed-media but have undergone different levels of sophistication especially in the area of materials, that are used in achieving these, like beads, glass, horns, feathers, bones and animal skin. Examples of artistic areas of expressing these art forms are in Still-life, Abstract, Portraiture, Landscape, etc. In all it has also not left out the use of other preferred materials and have thus provoked emotions on the psyche of viewers by experimenting and widely eager to explore new medium around. The essence of this paper is to reveal this style that combine various 2D geometric shapes of different sizes and shades of brown, to make a landscape composition. It also reveals that the features contained in the landscape composition could be geometrically analyzed in geometric shapes, sizes and monochromatic tones. This distinguishes the straw medium from the fluidity experienced when materials that are liquid and pasty like water colour, acrylic, oil, and dry media like pencil are used for aesthetic expressions. Straw medium is solid in nature, glued to a prepared fabric surface to achieve a peculiar finish work of art with different techniques like bricklaying, ambiguous and straw appliqué (Enenajor, 2010). The essence is also in placing value on the material found in

our geographical environment as useful. This buttresses the fact that the art of a people is influenced by the dominant materials found there, and not depending on foreign materials. It also provokes creative fulfillment and cultural awareness. A 3D art forms like “Molon kara” a local Xylophone is also produced from this straw plant which grows predominantly in the northern part of Nigeria. Unfortunately no conscious documentation and reference had been accorded the source of the material used to produce this cultural musical instrument of the Angas and Birom tribes of Jos Plateau.

### **The Medium and the composition**

In trying to achieve a landscape composition made in any medium, or using any approach the artist takes cognizance of the subject matter and its content. The artist has to represent the art from a particular eye level view point and also with understanding the character of the materials (medium) to be used. Most importantly the “Rule of Thirds” this is another guide in composing, though used more in photography than in art, but the concept still applies. Simply put; the concept is to avoid splitting the composition top to bottom, or side to side in half. Instead it should have a low or high horizon for instance, with one third at the top, two thirds at the bottom (visa-versa) than splitting a composition right down the middle (Johnson, 2010). However the arrangement still remains (foreground, middle ground and background) then observing balance relationship of scale, shapes, rhythm, pattern etc, with this preliminary knowledge a landscape composition will be achieved successfully as perceived by the artist. Going by the study of materials and methods, one could understand the limitations and freedom of the use of certain mediums in achieving particular details in artistic expression; such as wash-technique; which is limited to liquid medium (Gilbert,1998) etc. The nature and characteristics of materials categorize them into the dimensionality that fit their usages into 2D or 3D art. In the case in focus, that is the “straw medium,” it is used for 2D art and purely for aesthetic purposes. This is unlike in some cultures like the Asian and the Belarus where much of the straw art are three dimensions and for different functions that range from spiritual, fetish and utility like baskets, hats and mats.

### **The dynamics of tonal values in landscape composition**

The Straw medium as mentioned above is derived from one of the Nigerian grasses, dried naturally and toned by fire to different tones, ranging from yellow to brown and darker still to black. In studying colours and tonal values with reference to 2D and 3D effects, it should be known that

graduating tonal values (half-tones) impress depth and hence transmits an illusion of 3D. Since a landscape composition has been analyzed as having three major progressive segments it also shows that depths are involved to differentiate these segments to the viewers, and this can only be done by the use of graduating tonal values, sizes and angle of view (eye-levels), from the foreground through the middle ground to the background.

The straw medium is made ready for use in strips, Fig.2. It is shredded from the main dried plant (fig 1). Before or after the shredding the straw undergoes a toning process by fire. These strips are cleaned with sharp craft knife to paper flat. The straw strips are about 15cm long and about 2-5mm wide.

In their different lengths and widths these strips are cut at different angles to achieve different sizes of squares, rectangles, triangles, Kite, Rhombus and trapeziums as in fig.3 below.

In the same vein the very tiny strips less than 2mm represent lines and are used extensively to represent many features in a landscape composition. According to Rita Gilbert the function of lines in art is for the creation of patterns and textures. There are many types of lines (fig.4); the Actual lines (a) "Implied" lines (b, c) and line created by edge (d). (Gilbert, 1999, pp89.). These various types of lines are used prominently in achieving details in landscape compositions, some effects are achieved by using different thicknesses and different spacing of lines in proximate areas. However, due to the nature of the medium the Actual line is slightly broken especially where the curve is very sharp this is due to the linear nature of the medium. Hence most lines in straw art fall under the implied lines (Fig.4 b and c) and rarely as Actual lines unless in straight lines.

Geometric shapes are flat shapes that stand on their own on a 2D plane. When they are arranged in a given order they communicate a particular concept perceived by the viewer. When they are massed together in a conscious half hazard way they also communicate other concepts.

In making a foreground, straw bits and lengths are placed at certain angles that visually suggest different topographic features represented in perspective (Fig. 6) where darker tones suggest depth while lighter tones suggest high-light, and the direction of the source of light.

Three features play great roles in these combination arrangements as described below:

**Shapes;** Combination of same shape facing same direction and same shape facing opposite directions transmit different interpretations.

**Sizes;** Different sizes in quick succession depicts illusion of perspective

**Tones:** Tones are selected for use by sight or by the knowledge that vertical or horizontal the straw bit or length emits different tone. When horizontal, it emits a darker tone than when it is vertical with straw of same tone.

In achieving a meaningful composition, different shapes, sizes and shades of squares, triangles and trapeziums are combined at different angles (fig.5).

### **Related concepts**

Related concepts to this type of composition are Collage and Mosaic arts because they involve gluing one material on a flat surface to make a composition. They all have their limitations and excesses. However, they are far from photographic representations or some other related paintings that look very photographic. Since they are bits of materials glued on a surface they are ruggedly textured even when finished. Fig. 4 explains to a very large extent the reason for this ruggedness. This is because the works of art are predominantly with "Implied" bits and lengths of broken lines and are perceived as composition. Like in photography, the Camera only captures light in different tonal values and a combination of these half-tones are interpreted as a known and recognizable image to the viewer.

This characteristic nature peculiar with straw medium is similar to an illustrated landscape drawing by Vincent Van Gogh titled "Old Vineyard with Peasant woman" (Gilbert,1998. Pp.87). It consists almost entirely of short, choppy lines which give the work a rich visual texture Another combination of bits (dots) massed together to achieve artistic expression in 2D is "Pointillism". This art form was common with Georges Seural who was called a Neo-impressionist and a pointillist (Adams, 1999 pp. 795) He used uncountable dots of different colours and sizes to achieve artistic expressions.

### **Conclusion**

Creativity is a dynamic phenomenon. Two dimensional arts have undergone a lot of revolution in terms of medium of representation in style, technique and finish. The art of a place is directly unconsciously influenced by the ecology and serves different functions as stated above. As time evolved more creative feats were generated as the demand unveils and people's creativity.

Some are passed down from generation to generation through written or oral history of a culture, people or family. In some other cases they are discovered by necessity, inquisitiveness and by accident.

This paper is a forerunner in this guise in introducing the use of this medium for artistic expression especially in landscape composition. The most convenient and presently acceptable technique in achieving landscape composition with this medium by me is being released in this paper. This concept is also used in the making of Images and Portraiture in different techniques. (Enenajor, 2010)

The end product of this concept serves for beautification (aesthetic purposes) and also for therapeutic purposes. Its novelty undoubtedly makes it a revenue generating project. By implication, it projects the culture of the people by the features seen in their environment through the contents in the landscape compositions.

As bamboo and rids are known with the Asian countries and materials peculiar to different geographic areas of the world so also straw will be very handy to our geographic location in Nigeria. Since it could survive in Nigeria, it is expected that other geographical location as Nigeria along the tropics will also find this medium useful for this same purposes and type of artistic expressions and even more.

Present revolution in the 3D art representation; called "Installation" has transformed artistic perception and re-orientated artists' views of what "Art" entails and its limitations. Hence straw as medium stands to add to the repertoire of mediums of expression in generating new art forms.

### **References**

- Adams, L.S., (1998), *Art Across Time, Volume 2, The fourteenth century to the present*. Calman and King Ltd, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York
- Beykal, D, (2009), "Is Handwriting Becoming an Extinct Practice? The International Journal of Arts in Society, Commonground Publishers. Volume 4, Number 1, 2009. Pp.9.
- Enenajor, M. (2010), "Image making in two dimensional art; Experiences with straw and Fabric (Straw appliqué technique)", *African Research Review. An International Multi-disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*. Vol. 4(4), serial No. 17, October, 2010, pp. 521-528.

Enejor, M. (2010), Portraiture painting: An experience using the “straw” medium. *Journal of Creative Arts* Vol.4, No.1, January- December, 2008.pp. 66-73.

Gilbert, R. (1998), *Living with Art* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) pp.87. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York.

Johnson, L. D. (2011), <http://photoinf.com/GoldenMean/DianeJohnson/TheBestofLandscapeComposition.htm>.



Fig.1. The Straw stems at its dry state.



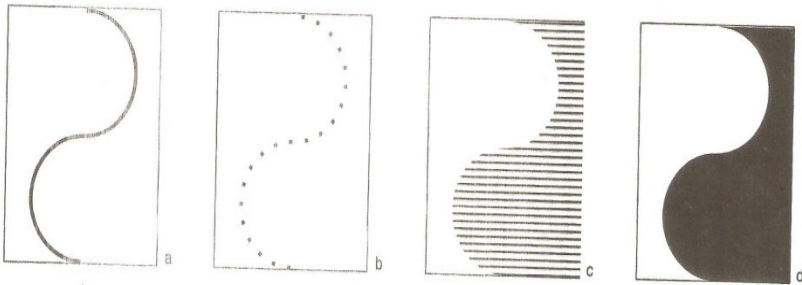
Fig. 2. The Straw stems when shredded.





*Landscape Composition: Using Geometric Shapes from the Straw Medium*  
 Square      Rectangle      Trapezium      ←-----Triangles-----→

Fig. 3. 2D Geometric shapes



above: 97. Actual line (a),  
 implied lines (b,c),  
 and line created by edge (d).

Fig.4 Types of lines (source: Gilbert, 1999)

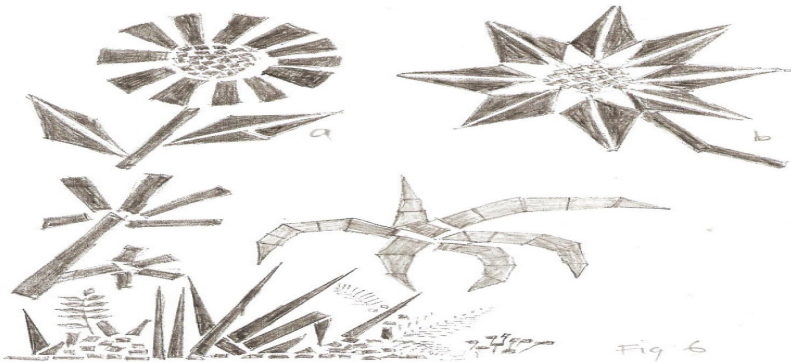


Fig. 5 Combination of different triangles, trapeziums squares and lines (Hand drawn).



Fig.6 Landscape composition in the Straw medium.



Plate 1. Typical landscape of village scenes



Example of Van Gogh's style "*Old Vineyard with Peasant Woman*".