

WOVEN SCULPTURAL PIECE AS ADDED DIMENSION TO TEXTILE DESIGN

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Abstract

Cane and Raffia are fibers which constitute vital parts of our material culture. There is a renewed manifestation of ingenuity by our local craftsmen in their deployment of these abundant raw materials within their reach. Various fibers are unique and resilient, with dynamic and expressive qualities. The ubiquitous use of cane and Raffia as sculpture materials, undoubtedly reveals, more fundamentally, the African environment as a repertoire of unexploited raw materials. Woven Textile Sculpture in African Arts has been treated with increasing attention pointing mainly to cultural significance, historic change, economic production, and distribution. The main thrust of this study, therefore, is to appraise the visual representation of textile sculpture through weaving and likewise study the materials used in terms of pliability, flexibility, durability, strength, and other artistic qualities. This study is an exposition on the processes involved in turning cane and raffia into durable, adorable objects of art, beauty and fashion. This is a creative adaptation to replace iron rods usually used by textile artists. It is a step forward in the usage of other possibilities to make textile arts more acceptable and enterprising as a discipline. This study has explored various techniques with particular intellectual dispositions that will enable us to interpret them in the way we choose and likewise document the experience and tradition for prosperity. However, if adequate attention is given to it, it can be combined with other textile materials, independently to create desirable design, which can compete favorably in the international textile and arts market.

Key words: Cane, Raffia, Woven Textile Sculpture, Adaptation, Textile Artist.

Introduction

The use of pliable materials for textile forms and sculptural representation is as old as humans. Various fiber materials in textile art have constituted a dynamic expressive media that allow for unlimited expression by contemporary artists. The pliable materials which are fibers are usually two dimensional, but can be used as a creative process to be transformed into three dimensional item (Woven Sculpture). Udeani (2014) describes Textile sculpture as a medium of expression with fibers, threads, yarns, fabric and movable objects through which sculptural forms are achieved by weaving and creative process.

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Bakare (2005) attests that textile sculpture is the method of using fibers as medium to construct sculptural works (three dimensional forms). This of course involves creativity to bring it to full physical reality. He went further to say that, the basic principles which apply to all other arts also apply to the choice of emphasis and structuring which eventually lead to an ultimately meaningful work. The use of fibers and non-woven fabrics such as cane, willow, raffia, leather etc. belong to a long established tradition which can reveal much about aesthetic and local technologies in textiles as well as the social and economic activities of the people who make them (Textile sculpture). The use of pliable materials has not been given adequate focus and little is known about their possibilities. Adams (2005) acknowledges that, some African artists namely, Akinbileje Tessa, Emah Eno Effiong, Makinde David Olajide, Udeani Nkem, Wale Olajide, Olumide Bakare, among others, are undoubtedly some of the most impressive textile artists from Nigeria considering their contributions in the area of textile sculptures. Even though, these artists have produced textile sculptures there are variations in their approaches, methods, materials, styles, designs and locations. This is a step forward in the operation of other possibilities to make textile arts more acceptable and enterprising as a discipline. Textile sculpture is an art form which has long been without an adequate descriptive name. Many artists have used words like wall-hangings and tapestries to describe the technique. Terms like "Textile Art" loaded with references which are not fully descriptive had also been used. The word art has been mentioned but "fabric" and textiles are commonly used for cloth yardage. Emah (1998) explains thus, that however, some artists trained in the Fine- Arts media were searching for other means of expression, so artists like Barbara Chase Ribond, Christian Lattiers, Peter Collingwood and a host of others discovered in fiber, yarn and textile based their techniques on perfect media. One can say that inspiration and the creative process of experience are innate drives of artistic practice. This statement may reveal how the artists deploy fibers, yarns and other techniques of textile construction to invent new products. The word "Sculpture" is often applied to some of the greatest three dimensional works which will seem to indicate not only volume but total honesty of artistic intent. The main thrust of this research therefore, is to appraise the visual representation of textile sculpture through weaving and likewise study the materials used in terms of pliability, flexibility, durability, strength, color-fastness and other artistic qualities. There is an exposition on the process involved in turning cane, willow, and raffia into pliable objects of beauty and texture effect that can be adapted and used for fabric decoration.

Concept of Woven Sculptural Piece in Textile Art

The desire of humans to create pleasant things is probably as old as civilization. Textile represents the rich culture and artistic creation in the African textile segment through structural relationships of forms, designs, patterns, and color expressed feelings and emotions which cannot be voiced in any other ways (Wikipedia, 2014). The subject of textile sculpture in African art has been treated with increasing attention pointing mainly to cultural significance, historical change, economic production and distribution. Textile sculpture is the method of construction in three dimensional forms with a kind of creativity required to bring that "Soul into full physical reality". It is obvious that the basic principles which apply to all the other arts apply to textile sculpture as well, particularly in terms of stylization. For example, the choice of emphasis and structuring which will eventually lead to an ultimately meaningful work of art is often important. One of the most impressive avenues to bridge the link between craft and fine arts is through textile work which acts as mixed media sculpture. This may not fit within the confines of traditional fine art media, but nonetheless captures the fancy of contemporary curators and

collectors. Sculpture permits the artists to break free from the concept of the decorative and focus more on the process, the message and goal. The following sculpture artists use textile and mixed media to do both:

	Name	Medium
i.	Judy Tadman	-rope sculpture
ii.	Karnie Jollets	-anatomical sculpture
iii.	Mister Frich	-dramatic sculpture
iv.	Liz Alpeit Fray	-mixed media sculpture
v.	Lauren Scott	-works in producing animal reproduction through (textile.org,2015).

Special words

Adaptation: To make suitable to requirement or conditions; adjust or modify fittingly.

Cane: Is any of various tall, perennial grasses with flexible, woody stalks, and pecia more specially from the genus *Arundinria*.

Raffia: The raffia palms (*Raphia*) are a genus of about twenty species of palms native to tropical regions of Africa.

Textile Arts: Traditionally the term art was used to refer to any skill or to the textile arts as well (fiber art).

Willow: Array of strong natural cane materials of all sort for cane work.

Adams (2005) observes that Christian Lattiers is undoubtedly one of the most impressive and creative artists. His sculptural expression in rope is very great and dynamic. He creates perfect deal of patience and precise technical skills. Makinde (2004) indicates that Wale Olajide a Nigerian artist uses yarns of varied intense colors to create visual effects in his works. He is a contemporary artist with keen sense of harmony. Irene (1977) notes that these textile artists weave directly with fingers interlacing the yarns without making use of shuttle or harnesses. The technique can be taken as a high point of textile sculpture, one of such weavers is Magdalena Abakanowkz, a Polish. Textile sculpture as a whole is just finding its footing Nigeria, the interest is just being acknowledged by a few growing textile artists in the black world.

Materials and Tools

The materials for textile sculptural art vary with the terrain and what is available locally. This brings about differences in the required materials and different products according to the localities where they are gotten. Fibers are the major materials for Textile sculpture. Fibers could be defined as pliable hair-like substances that are very small in diameter in relation to their length. They are the fundamental unit used in the making of textile yarns or fabric. Oguntona (1986) supports that, fibers are made of lightly, crystalline structure regions oriented in the direction of the fibers axis. Fibers means spinable materials including natural and man-made filaments. Cane and raffia are fibers and have revealed the ingenuity of the local craftsman and woman in using the abundant raw materials within their reach. Abidogun (1993) argues that one of the earliest crafts practices throughout the world is cane and raffia craft. This process involves a technology in corporate skill development, aesthetic presentation and production. Shirley

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(1974) stresses that West African cane and raffia is a creation of beauty. Its rhythmic and complex designs are truly works of arts. Picton (1989) also states that traces of raffia weaving were reported in Fernando, an Island close to the Niger Delta. Bakare (2005) corroborates that, the origin of raffia weaving is attributed to the worship of the deities. The Ikot- Ekpene weavers believe that their forefathers practiced weaving craft using raffia to keep the tradition alive; the present generation continues the crafts and likewise deploys it for economic self-reliance. Bakare (2005) concludes that, for long time, cane and raffia were the flourishing industry catering to the needs of the entire population of indigenes of southern part of Nigeria, where less attention has been given to exploration of cane and raffia for textile sculpture. However, if adequate attention is given to it, it can be combined with other textile materials, independently to create desirable design, which can compete favorably in the international textile and arts market.

In recognition of the significance of cane and raffia to the local economy, the researcher has attempted to make the best use of these available material. Cane, willow, raffia, leather were majorly used in the execution of this project in order to achieve the textile-sculpture solidity and woven effects. Cane and willow were used for the armature. Cane, raffia, leathers, were also used for structures of the forms. These were executed with the use of tools, equipment and other materials, such as horns, cowries -shell, gourds and other accessories. Others include needle, dyes and chemicals, vanish, basin, exotic, nose-cover, nails, harmer, measuring tape, brush and hand- gloves.

Practical Procedure

In this research, cane, willow, and raffia were used extensively in the execution. This is because they retain innate qualities of what one can call 'nature'. Again radical abstract ideas find smooth channel of communication through them. Through this means one can explore and approach new techniques of woven material and construct them into a three dimensional form under the following:

- i. Sketches of likeness and design of costume of the woven sculptural representation.
- ii. Collection of cane and willow for armature, iii.Cutting, fixing, joining, and neatening of cane and willow for construction of the project work.
- iii. Weaving construction by making use of raffia and cane.
- vi. Use of leather and other clothing materials e.g. cowries shell, gourds, beads etc.vi. Finishing.

Description of the Woven Sculptural Piece

The interesting part of what is referred to as textile sculpture is the method of construction in three dimensional forms and the kind of creativity that is required to bring it to full physical manifestation. The basic principles which apply to all other woven fabrics also apply to all other art as well, particularly in the choice of emphasis, balance, rhythm and structuring which will eventually lead to an ultimately meaningful piece. Textile sculpture is foreign, it can still be added that the technique, styles and emotional experience are somehow with "human grandeur". Textile sculpture gives room for creative elements and magnificence. It gives one progressive steps of discoveries in the choice of fibers, colors and pattern formation. In the weaving construction, cane and raffia were wound round structures of the armature.

Construction of Armature with Cane Willow:

There are basic rules in the production of armature for textile sculptural piece.

i. **Sketching:** A rough sketch of the Woven sculptural piece was drawn on the paper. This is known as “motif”, which is the raw-stage of any art work.



Plate I: sketch (motif) of likeness and design of costume of the woven sculptural

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Plate II
Construction of the armature using willow for the braiding



Plate iii: Plain weave techniques

Weaving is a method of interlacing threads deals with two sets of thread, the weft and the warp threads. Warp yarns in weaving is a set of threads, all spread out parallel to each other, held in tension and vary in size, texture, color and spacing.

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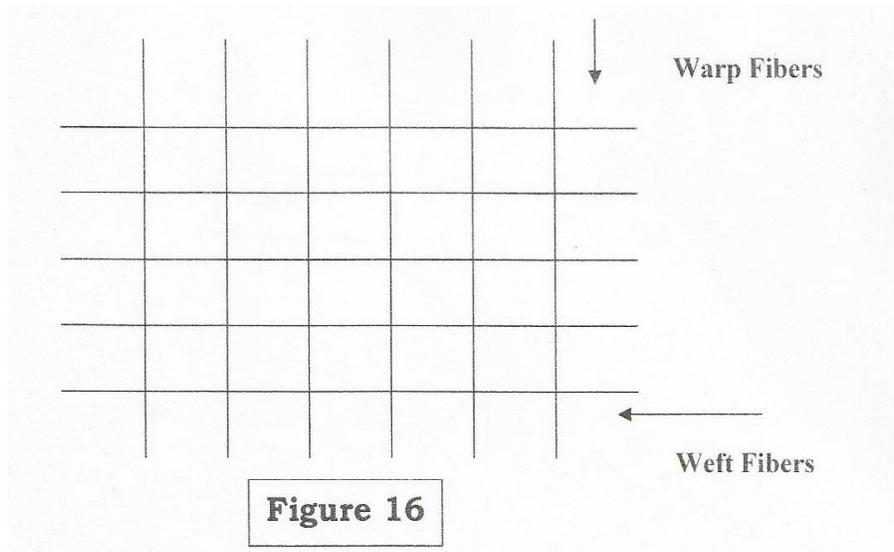


Figure 1: showing weft and warp yarns

The weft threads are the threads that cross the warp at the right angles. This can be intertwined in numerous ways, knotted, or cut after it is laid in place. The weft threads could be used to wind round the figure to be woven especially in the execution of the textile sculpture.

Three basic weaving methods were used in the execution of this work (piece); these were basket, kanash and coiling weaving techniques.

i. Basket weaving was used for the weaving of the body structure of the piece, which interlaced one-up and one down. Basket weave is commonly called plain weave.

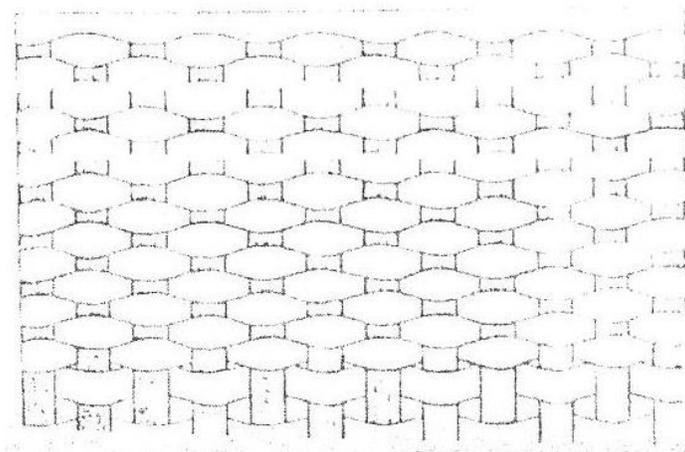


Figure II: showing basket

ii. Kanash weaving was used for the execution of the clothing. This could be observed in plate III:



Plate iv: Weaving construction of the hands and legs of the woven sculptural piece.

Using weaving effect is interesting and rhythmic in nature. This can be adapted for surface decoration of fabrics. Kanash is complicated but highly decorative. The other variation of Kanash is “double

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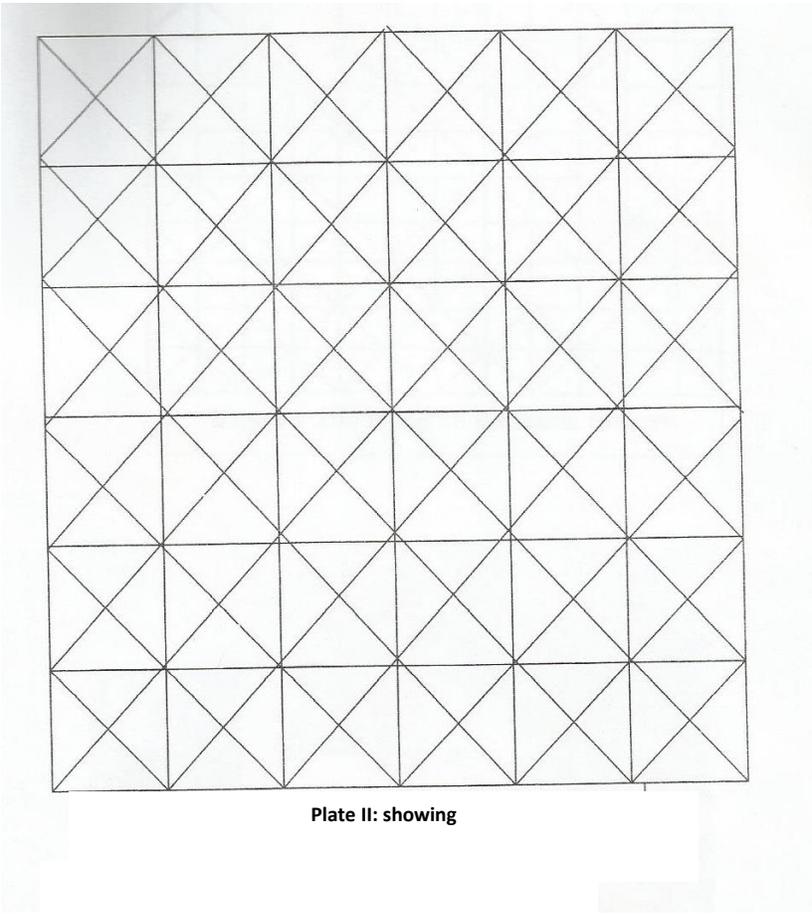


Plate II: showing

kanash”. This type of weaving is more complicated and tedious to weave. This was used for sophisticated areas.

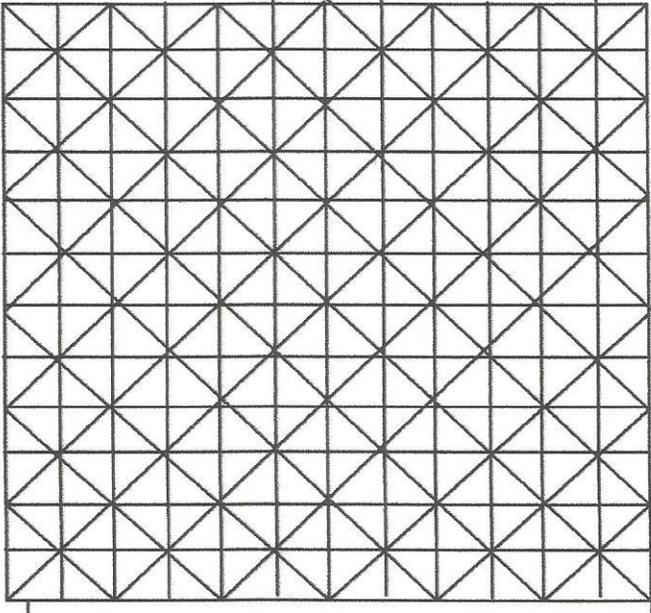


Figure IV: showing weaving construction of the sculptural piece using Kanash and double Kanash weave.

iii. Coiling Method, was also used to finish the intricate part such as eyes, nose, mouth, and fingers. This is a process in which a length of cane is wound into continuous circular shapes. It can occur at any part of the work. It was used at the feet of this work (piece) to anchor and fasten the piece to the stand. This called for originality and creativity which was arrived at with the use of natural fibers, cane, willow, and raffia.



Plate V: woven in Kanash and Double Kanash, the cultural piece standing on a woven stand/base awaiting the woven raffia and leather

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Color raffia was used on the neck, chest and waist of the woven sculptural piece. The raffia material was separately woven and attached. There were attachments of other accessories such as leather, horns, beads, cowry shell, and gourds to complement the paraphernalia of the woven sculptural piece

Finishing: The rough surface of the structure of the woven sculptural piece was sand papered and a blow-lamp (at low range) was used to remove the unwanted shaft on it and the flame burnt some portions to create a decorative effect of patches on the structure. Immediately after this, wood vanish was applied through the aid of applicator (brush) and allowed to dry and shine. This makes it strong, water proof and perceivable for future generation to come.



Plate VI: fixing the accessories,

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Plate VII: view of the finished woven sculpture

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendation:

The use of pliable material belongs to a long established tradition, which can reveal much about aesthetic and local technologies in textile art as well as the social and economic activities of the people who make them. The use of cane and raffia for textile sculptural piece is a creative ingenuity and this is a step forward in the operation of other possibilities to make textile art more acceptable and enterprising as a discipline. This research has appraised the visual representation of textile sculptural piece through weaving and likewise explored the materials and other artistic qualities. Weaving has always been the medium with the greatest potential, everything was done

by woven/construction and there are series of problems encountered in the process of making this sculptural piece.

- i. The first problem was how to get the likeness sketch of the woven sculptural piece,
- ii. The second was the involvement in dyeing with chemicals which are very dangerous to human health. The caustic soda is corrosive in nature and sodium hydro- sulphate is also dangerous when it is inhaled. Inhaling the fumes from the chemicals can have an adverse effect on the human lungs.
- iii. Lastly, the weaving construction of the piece was too tedious because of the nature of The Piece, some areas were so rounded that the cane could be steady when the weaving was on. .
- iv. Adhesiveness on the willow was applied to gum or attach the cane on the willow as the solution to the problem.

This research has documented the extent to which pliable materials (cane, willow and raffia) could be adapted for woven Textile Sculpture. This is also expected to reduce the problem (weight and solidity) faced by textile-artists in using iron rods in the construction of armatures for woven sculpture. It is important to note that this woven sculptural piece has explored the potential of manipulating yarns to create something that is not only aesthetic but also hand crafted. It is envisaged that this research will boost the patronage of local products and conserve the country's foreign exchange earnings. It will also open avenues for further explorations into visual documentation of textile sculptural pieces in the society and contribute to knowledge. Finally, it will create a new dimension in the medium used by textile artists. It is recommended that, seminars, practical workshops, and training should be encouraged among the textile artists, craftsmen and women, and students at large on the use of cane, willow and raffia for textile sculptural pieces.

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