

The Development of Cornstalk as a Medium of Painting

Jacob Jari

B.A. Hons, M.A., P.G.D.E. (A.B.U.)

A Project Write-up Submitted to the Postgraduate School,
Ahmadu Bello University in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirement for the Award of Master of Fine arts (M.F.A)
Degree in Painting.

Department of Fine Arts
Faculty of Environmental Design
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria

1994

Declaration

I, Jacob Jari hereby declare that this project write-up has been written by me and is a record of my own research. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree.

Jari, Jacob 2/6/94
Jari, Jacob

Certification


This project write-up entitled The Development of Cornstalk as a Medium of Painting by Jari, Jacob meets the regulations governing the award of the Degree of Master of Fine Arts (Painting) of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The research is therefore approved for its contribution to Knowledge.


Mr. Gani Odutokun
First Supervisor

8-8-94
Date


Mr. L.T. Bentu
Second Supervisor

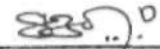
8/8/94
Date


Mr. Gani Odutokun
Head of Department

8-8-94
Date

Mr. Obiora Udechukwu
External Examiner

Date


Dean, Post Graduate School

30/09/99
Date

Acknowledgements

I wish to express gratitude for the supervision of Mr. G. Odutokun and Mr. L. Bentu. I am also grateful to all those who at one time or the other, helped in procuring or peeling the cornstalk with which the works were executed.

Credits for illustrations used in Figure 1 and 2 go to Mount(1973); Figure 3 and 4 to Fosu(1986); and Figure 5, 6, 7, and 8 to Ochigbo(1991).

Jacob Jari
A.B.U., Zaria
April, 1994.

The Development of Cornstalk as a Medium of Painting

by

Jacob Jari

B.A. ,M.A. ,P.G.D.E.(A.B.U.)

The general objective of this research was not only to process cornstalk into tesserae for the production of mosaics, but it also included the actual experimentation with the processed cornstalk in the execution of works. It sought to explore possibilities of discovering an individual expression. The works were produced under the broad outlines of representational and nonrepresentational works. The representational works included realistic studies of observed scenes; attempt at fusion of space with silhouettes; and stylised representation of figures in a mimesis of child art. The nonrepresentational works on the other hand included the portrayal of basic geometric shapes; compositions with emphasis on interaction of colours; and improvisations using water in shaping forms that were eventually rendered in tesserae.

It may be concluded from the experiences derived from the execution of works that cornstalk provides many opportunities for self expression. The type of work any artist can produce with it is dependent on the ability of the artist in shaping and sticking it unto a surface,

Table of Contents

	Page
Title Page.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Illustrations.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.3 Conceptual Framework.....	2
1.4 Objective of the Study.....	4
1.5 Justification of the Study.....	4
1.6 Delimitation of the Study.....	5
1.7 Description of Terms.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 Theories on Found Objects.....	6
2.3 Theories on the Creation of Mosaics with Found Objects.....	9
2.4 Previous Studies on Related Areas in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.....	16
2.5 Summary.....	23
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD OF RESEARCH	
3.1 Introduction.....	24
3.2 Materials Used.....	25
3.3 Pilot Survey.....	25
3.4 Procedure of Work.....	27
3.5 Exploration of Form.....	30

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF WORKS	
4.1 Introduction.....	31
4.2 Representational Works.....	31
4.3 Nonrepresentational Works.....	41
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
5.1 Introduction.....	54
5.2 Findings.....	55
5.3 Procedure of Work.....	56
5.4 Conclusion.....	56
5.5 Recommendations.....	57
References.....	59

List of Illustrations

	Page
Figure 1: <u>Obatala and the Devil</u>	12
Figure 2: <u>Flute Player</u>	13
Figure 3: <u>Commune of Mothers</u>	14
Figure 4: <u>Ulism I</u>	15
Figure 5: <u>New Yam Festival Notes</u>	19
Figure 6: <u>Discussants</u>	20
Figure 7: <u>The Gulf Battle</u>	21
Figure 8: <u>Illusions and Realities</u>	22
Plate I: <u>Mosaic No.1</u>	33
Plate II: <u>Mosaic No.2</u>	34
Plate III: <u>Mosaic No.3</u>	35
Plate IV: <u>Mosaic No.4</u>	37
Plate V: <u>Mosaic No.5</u>	38
Plate VI: <u>Mosaic No.6</u>	39
Plate VII: <u>Mosaic No.7</u>	40
Plate VIII: <u>Mosaic No.8</u>	42
Plate IX: <u>Mosaic No.9</u>	43
Plate X: <u>Mosaic No.10</u>	44
Plate XI: <u>Mosaic No.11</u>	45
Plate XII: <u>Mosaic No.12</u>	46
Plate XIII: <u>Mosaic No.13</u>	48
Plate XIV: <u>Mosaic No.14</u>	49
Plate XV: <u>Mosaic No.15</u>	50
Plate XVI: <u>Mosaic No.16</u>	51
Plate XVII: <u>Mosaic No.17</u>	52
Plate XVIII: <u>Mosaic No.18</u>	53

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In April 1986, the Ministry of Education, Jos instructed its zonal inspectorate offices to organize exhibitions of locally produced instructional materials where a selection of the best entries would be made. This was to prepare the Ministry for a National exhibition of local instructional materials to be held in Kaduna later in the year. The exhibitions at the zonal level attracted entries from all the post primary institutions of each zone. The researcher was then an art teacher in the Government Science Teachers' College, Amper, in Pankshin zone. The responsibility of producing a representative exhibit for the College fell on him. What occurred to him to produce was tesserae using cornstalk, a medium that probably had not been used before for this purpose. Initially, the intention was to use these cornstalk tesserae as instructional materials in the classroom for the teaching of the execution of mosaics on walls. It was his opinion that cornstalk should replace paper which was hitherto used for mosaic instructions; the reason being that paper tesserae were flat and two dimensional and therefore failed to show any semblance to conventional tesserae. Cornstalk on the other hand, when peeled and sliced, are three dimensional yet they are as light as paper and can be stuck easily to any dry surface with glue.

This initial concept of using the cornstalk tesserae only as instructional materials during mosaic lessons took a new dimension when a few demonstrations were carried out. It became evident to the researcher that a new medium of painting could be developed because the cornstalk tesserae turned up with unique qualities of their own.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The possibilities of using cornstalk as a medium for painting have not yet been explored. This study intends to do this. Questions on the durability and amenability of the medium may be raised. For instance, can all cornstalk be sliced without breaking off? What types of surfaces and glue are suitable for use with it? Can cornstalk be successfully coloured? How permanent would the colours remain? How can the reaction of organisms such as insects that may attempt eating or residing in the cornstalk be stemmed?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

According to Anthony(1968), the "method of placing small pieces of differently colored materials closely together so as to form a surface, usually with a pattern or a pictorial representation" is known as mosaic in painting. The "pieces of differently colored materials" are usually called tesserae. This study will therefore

be involved with the creation of mosaics with cornstalk tesserae. A conventional mosaic is meant to be viewed from a distance because the tesserae create an impression of fusion as in painting. The generally favoured surfaces therefore are exterior walls. Since such walls are exposed to the hazards of weathering, corrosion and dirt, the conventional tesserae necessarily have to withstand them. Thus mosaics maintain their original brilliance and lustre even when the walls on which they are executed become weak with age. Suitable tesserae for such mosaics on exterior walls include small marbles known as Smalti, Vitreous tesserae, Venetian glass tesserae, and ceramic tesserae.

The origins of mosaic are believed to belong to primitive man. According to Williamson(1963), "the earliest record of decorative mosaics are among relics of ancient North American Cultures". It is also believed that the Neolithic cultures of the Mesopotamian area created mosaics. The Greeks of the Hellenistic period and the Romans are acclaimed to be the first people to use mosaics extensively. However, according to Anthony (op.cit.), "mosaics are not confined to one area or one period. Various peoples during the last few thousand years have used them as a means of artistic expression" (p32).

1.4 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this research is to develop cornstalk into a medium of painting. It will specifically attempt to,

- a. produce differently coloured pieces of cornstalk suitable for creating pictures in form of mosaics;
- b. explore possibilities of creating representational or nonrepresentational forms using the coloured pieces of cornstalk; and
- c. execute mosaics with the pieces of cornstalk that can be displayed in interiors and appreciated from short distances.

1.5 Justification of the Study

- i. The use of cornstalk in painting connotes art from a found object. When successful, this study would have introduced a new medium of painting thereby adding to knowledge.
- ii. The prohibitive cost of executing mosaics using conventional tesserae has resulted in low patronage. When successful, this study will accord an opportunity to individuals and establishments to own mosaics at cheap cost.
- iii. The executed mosaics with cornstalk tesserae will not be significantly heavier than oils on board. They can therefore be easily displayed on walls. This implies that the effective appreciation of

the mosaics can be undertaken within the comfort of any room including small ones.

- iv. When successful, the study may influence a greater need for exploring possibilities with unconventional materials. This, apart from increasing the number of cheap and available media, may also open up new fields in aesthetics.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

This study is limited to producing cornstalk tesserae and mosaics to be displayed in interiors. Cornstalk tesserae are not alternatives to conventional ones.

1.7 Description of Terms

Cornstalk: It refers to the stalk or stem of corn, in this case, grain sorghums.

Cornstalk tesserae: This term stands for pieces of differently coloured cornstalk ready for use in the execution of mosaics.

Mosaic: This word implies a painting created by means of sticking tesserae closely together.

Processing of Cornstalk: In the context of this study, this term refers to the shaping and colouring of cornstalk.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The projection of this study is to be able to process cornstalk, a found object into a medium of painting and to use the processed cornstalk to explore possibilities of executing forms. In this chapter therefore, a review of the theories of found objects has been made. The manner in which mosaics have been executed by some Nigerian artists with other unconventional materials has also been reviewed. Some literature connected with the development of form from the exploration of new media for expression has been reviewed as well.

2.2 Theories on found objects

Stribling(1970) tries to put the use of found objects in art in an historical perspective. She states that,

Found Art is a term coined to describe works which are composed in part or entirely of natural or salvaged objects. It follows that all primitive craftsmen were Found Artists since they had no other sources for supplies...As he (primitive craftsman) became more advanced, he learned to develop completely original designs through extensive alterations of the found object and often combined several different kinds of materials with it (p2).

She states that Picasso was the first modern artist to use found objects in art. Braque, Gris and the Dadaists followed later. She therefore thinks that found art has existed over the years particularly among folk

craftsmen. She treats different types of found objects under different media spanning ten chapters.

Timmons(1974) realizes "that materials and techniques are but 'the means to an end' in art,... a basic, working knowledge of them expands the artist's vocabulary for creative, personal expression"(p7). She states that it is necessary to use found objects because conventional materials and funds are not "Inexhaustible". She therefore lists some found objects which have been found to be adequate by artists. These objects range from adhesives, paints, inks, gesso, dyes, and several others.

Also Reed and Orze(1974) give a long list of "scrap materials" under graphics, sculpture and crafts. They even include "formulas and mixtures" for the production of some materials. They hope that their work will "stimulate exploration in a broad range of creative expressions". They even claim that "The use of scrap materials... stimulates the imagination in a manner that regular art materials are not likely to do"(p8).

Perhaps Picasso found this out when, according to de la Croix et.al.(1980), he started introducing "extraneous materials to the canvas in a technique called 'collage'". They cite the example of Picasso's Still Life with Chair-caning which he completed in 1912. On the painting, he pasted the seat of a caned

chair to the canvas. By so doing they claim, "Pictorial art here takes a step toward relief sculpture". Picasso continued to try other found materials. It is reported by Liebman(1979) that some of the many found materials he used ranged from sand, forks, toy cars, twigs, baskets and pieces of wood to bicycle seats and handlebars.

There were other artists who were fascinated by the use of found objects. George Braque used news paper cuttings and other materials in works like The Clarinet , Bottle, Glass and Pipe , and Musical Forms . Joan Gris, according to de la Croix et.al.(op.cit.), in an attempt to "create new objects which cannot be compared to any object, in actuality", also used extraneous materials while Jasper Johns elevates flimsy items to monumental stature through the use of found objects as portrayed in Painted Bronze . Robert Rauschenberg calls his paintings with found objects, "combined paintings". Sometimes they are executed on large surfaces using perishable items, a sign of protest against Abstract Expressionism, a movement he deserted. Another artist who used found objects as media for protest-art was Jean Dubuffet. De la Croix et.al. state that in Nude, Olympia for example, Dubuffet portrayed,

a brutally distorted, primitivistic-fetishistic version of that venerable tradition of the female nude that goes back to the Venetians...Having in mind the graffiti of Paris walls, the accidental collages built upon their surfaces with posters and fragments of posters, smeared, scrowled over and cut into, Dubuffet prepared a coarse ground of sand, earth, glues, and other materials into

which he roughly incised his figures, making use of every accident in the process. Treated this way, the surface becomes a tactile reality in itself, at the same time manifesting figural and symbolic shapes of primeval power or, as here, of hideous decomposition. The message of this work is echoed in the view of...Dubuffet, who saw human nature as essentially vile...(p856-857).

Stanfield(1956) is also of the opinion that art does not mean working with only conventional materials. He claims that Nigeria is rich in providing substitutes. He therefore thinks that no artist should complain about not having art materials because they abound locally. He thinks that art students should be encouraged to prepare their own materials as it is an important part of their training. It is his opinion that it will be more satisfying for such students if they used locally obtained shells and seed pods for the creation of patterns for instance than using expensive ready-made materials.

2.3 Theories on the Creation of Mosaics with found objects

Jimoh Buraimoh, a Nigerian artist and a 1964 graduate of the Mbari Mbayo workshop in Oshogbo is the Nigerian and perhaps one of those internationally known who has most extensively used unconventional materials in the execution of mosaics. It is stated for example in an exhibition catalogue, Contemporary African Art that "He has developed his own techniques of mosaic art, which have a Byzantine texture and brilliance". It is further claimed by this catalogue that Buraimoh's

mosaics executed by the use of beads and cowries have been commissioned by many important clients in Lagos and Ibadan while others have been extensively exhibited in Britain and India.

Mount(1973) describes some of Buraimoh's mosaics which themes he states are drawn from Yoruba mythology and legend. He explains that sometimes Buraimoh's beads are used extensively on the surface of the painting while at other times the beads are only used as contours to shape out the outline of colourful forms as in Obatala and the Devil and Flute Player . When this happens, the other areas are painted with bright primary colours that blend well with the equally bright colours of the beads. Mount further states that apart from using beads, Buraimoh also experiments with cowrie shells and pebbles. His surfaces vary from cloth to boards. Fosu(1986) adds that when Buraimoh uses plain beads, "he paints over them and shellacs them to a glossy finish".

Another contemporary Nigerian artist who used unconventional materials in the realisation of mosaics is Chuka Amaefuna. Fosu states that "cowrie shells, beads, and seeds are some of the assortment of indigenous materials which he uses in arranging his imageries in colourful abstract combinations"(p193). Fosu further explains that Amaefuna as a member of the Igbo ethnic

group, like Okeke and Udechukwu, chose to explore Uliism, a traditional mode of art with the Igbo, as his avenue for expression. It is therefore in this Uliism that he used these unconventional materials. In order to visualize how the materials Amaefuna used relate with the Uli shapes, it becomes pertinent to state at length Fosu's description of Uliism I.

...there appears to be a romantic relationship between the various linear Uli shapes that exhibit organic qualities. Three of these penetrate deep into suspended vertical positions within a background of tripartite modules of red and yellow checkered contrasts. These are complimented by other curvilinear shapes of grey and purple contrasts. The contours assume the hybrid shape of a pot, a drum and a human head. Organized at the outer fringes of the dominant motif designs are a series of sea-shells that float in space. Each linear and curvilinear shape is outlined in clean white cowrie shells that contrast admirably with the multifarious colours of the major motifs and the broad sea-blue background(p193).

Mention should also be made of Moyo Okediji, a contemporary Nigerian artist whose experiments with unconventional materials led to his production of paintings with soil pigments.

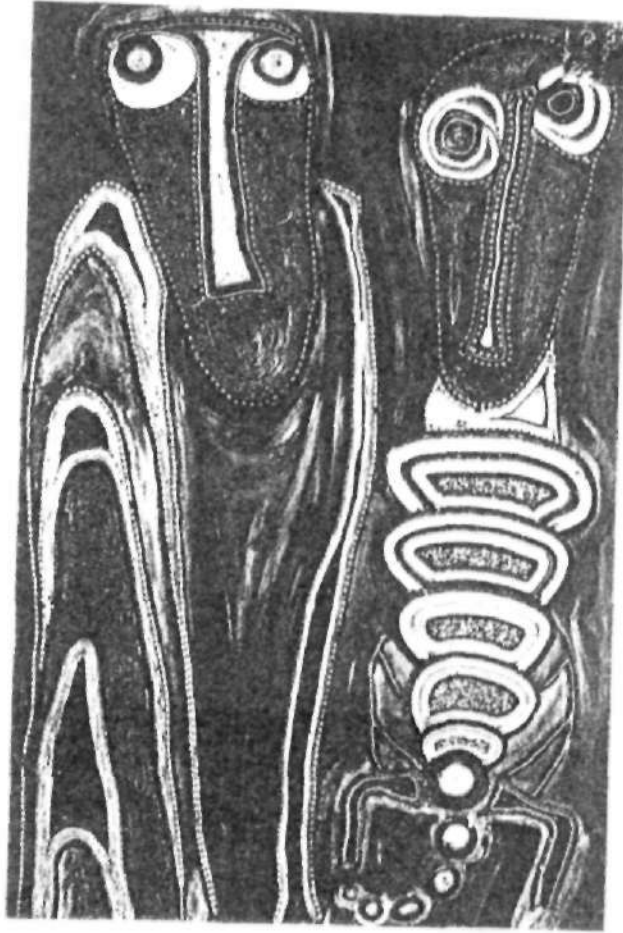


Figure 1: Jimoh Buraimoh
Obatala and the Devil,
oil and glass beads on hardboard



Figure 2: Jimoh Buraimoh
Flute Player,
oil and glass beads on hardboard

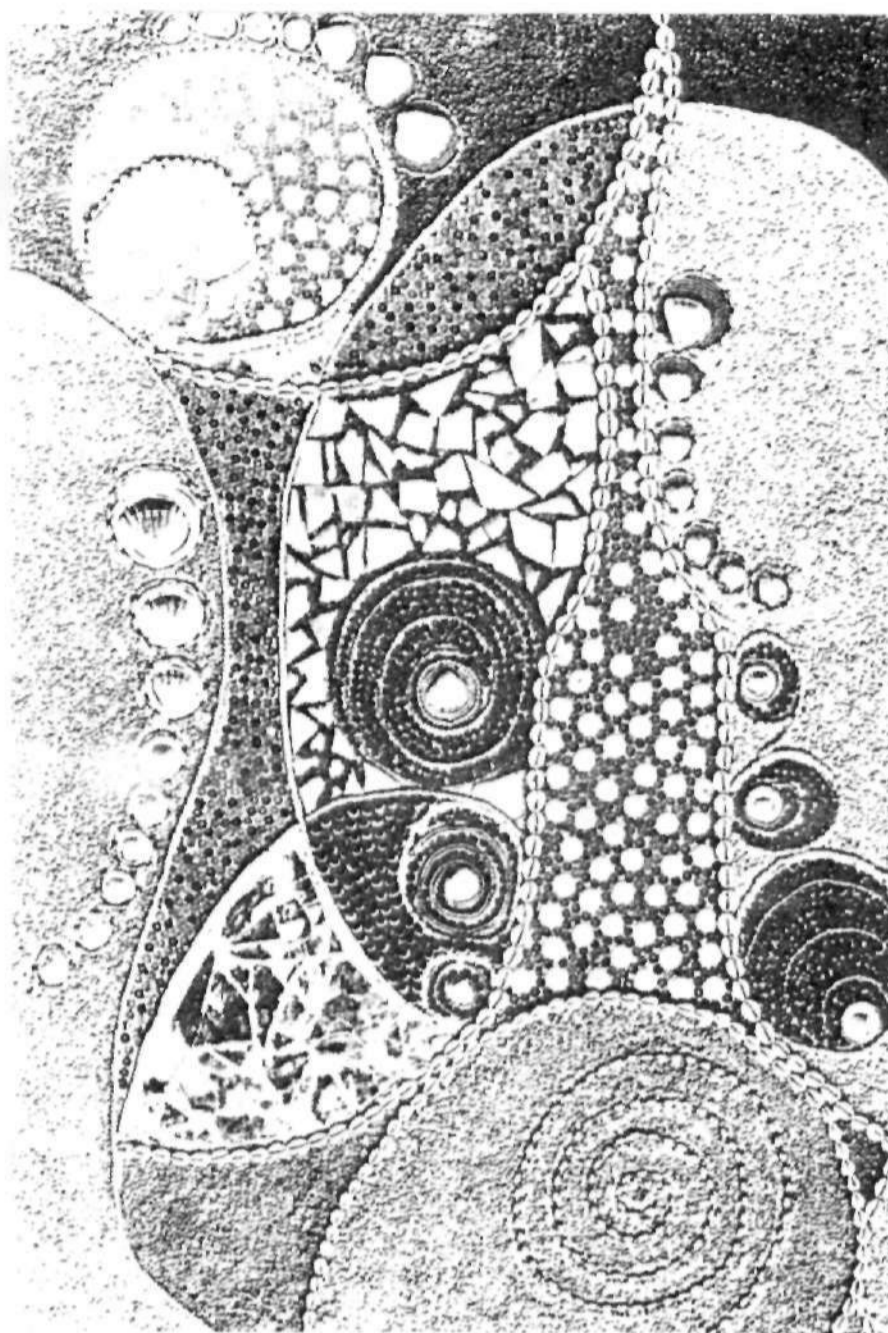


Figure 3: Chuka Amaefuna
Commune of Mothers ,
mixed media.

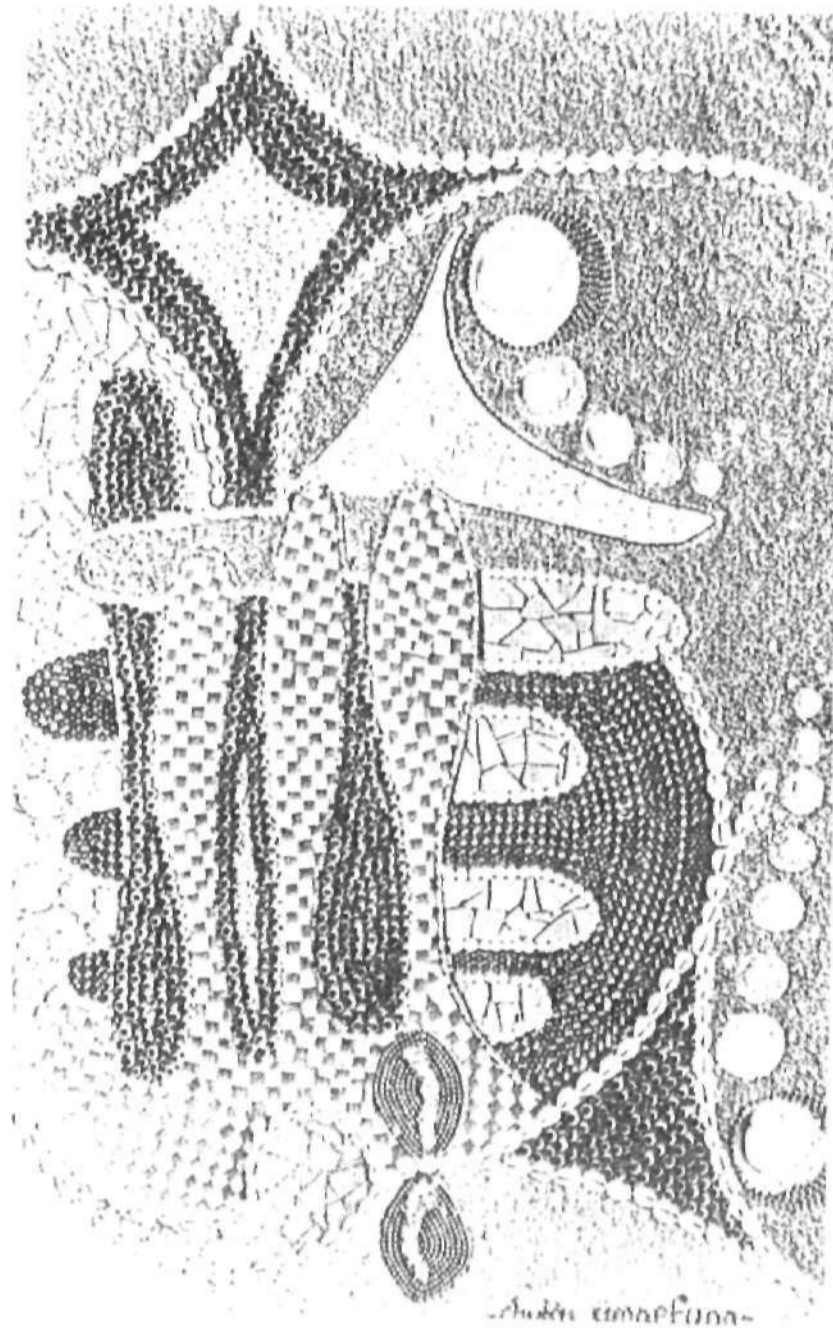


Figure 4: Chuka Amaefuna
Ulism I,
mixed media

2.4 Previous Studies on Related Areas in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

A few researches have been conducted with the intention to explore possibilities with unconventional materials in art expression. Okinedo(1985) for instance, aimed at procuring colours from local sources such as plants, earth and the fireplace and to explore the likelihood of their use in studio practice. The research established among other things that local colours could be easily processed and obtained inexpensively and not only could be used in studio practice but could also expand opportunities for artistic expressions. It viewed the possibilities of producing good art materials locally as the beginning of the establishment of an art industry in Nigeria capable of attracting foreign exchange, employing labour and generating income. Okinedo executed 25 paintings, drawings and sketches with the local colours portraying representational and nonrepresentational forms. It was not however, a study in the development of forms.

The research by Sani(1986) was fashioned after the one undertaken the previous year by Okinedo(op.cit.) which has been reviewed. The objectives appeared similar but the range in the number of local colours obtained differed. Apart from the sources already listed by Okinedo, Sani had additional sources such as animal shells and kola-nuts. Sani also used the local colours like

Okinedo to produce paintings that portrayed representational and nonrepresentational forms with emphasis on the ability of the local colours to compete favourably with conventional ones.

Asidere(1990) through the experimental method, explored and executed about six different techniques of collage painting with off-cut fabrics he obtained from sewing shops. The techniques included, "off-cut collage on plain fabric; off-cut collage on dyed fabric; off-cut collage on enamel surfaced fabric; off-cut collage on off-cuts-surfaced fabric; off-cut collage on acrylic painted fabric and off-cuts/crayon on fabric"(pvii). The objective of the research was to "explore the potentialities of fabric off-cuts" in picture making as well as to highlight their aesthetic qualities. The supports used were mainly larger fabrics of cloth or canvas. The off-cuts were either glued or sewn to them. Sometimes the off-cuts were dyed with other colours other than the ones in which they appear such as enamels, acrylics or crayons in the attempt to portray figures, mostly stylized female figures, in light and shade.

Ochigbo(1991) set to explore possibilities of painting with the burning technique. There was first the exploration of monochrome burning which, according to him, formed "the underlying basis for all other developments". It was followed by the exploration with the application of

colour pigments to the burnt surface. The third set of experiments involved the introduction of melted plastics which was followed by the introduction of extraneous materials.

The research was not only an experiment with materials and technique, it was also a "search for individual expression". It appeared that with every new experiment the mode of expression changed slightly. For example, the monochrome paintings portrayed representational forms such as shown in New Yam Festival Notes . When colour was applied the works assumed a form of stylization such as shown in Discussants . The expressions became abstract when plastics were introduced as shown by The Gulf Battle while the introduction of extraneous materials help to influence an art form akin to installations as portrayed in Illusions and Realities .



Figure 5: Simon Ochigbo
New Yam Festival Notes , 1990
monochrome burning on board,
122x91cm



Figure 6: Simon Ochigbo
Discussants , 1990,
burning and colour on board,
91x61cm



Figure 7: Simon Ochigbo,
The Gulf Battle , 1991,
burning with coloured plastics on board
135x90cm

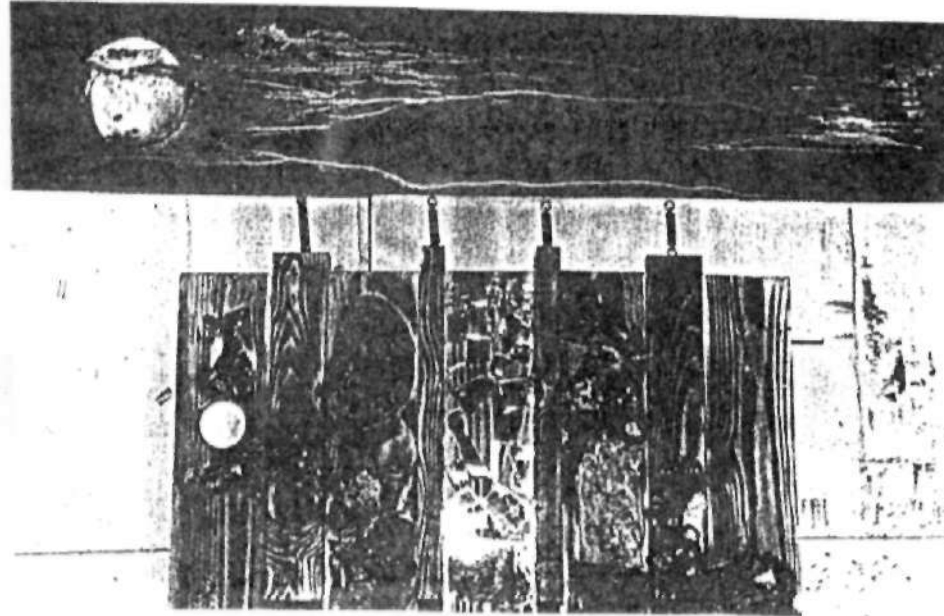


Figure 8: Simon Ochigbo
Illusions and Realities , 1991,
burning, mixed media and estraneous
materials on wood, 91x50cm

2.5 Summary

In this chapter some theories on found objects, on the creation of mosaics with found objects, and on previous studies already undertaken in related areas were reviewed. It was established that many artists had found some unconventional materials to be cheap and favourable for use in artistic expression. Some artists even think that the materials create more expressive works than the regular or conventional ones. In most of the researches already undertaken in the use of local or found materials however, the objective appeared to centre interest solely on materials and the technique of usage. The exception was Ochigbo(op.cit.) who went further to explore what he termed "individual expression". In doing so, he used the new burning techniques to first of all render representational forms then stylized forms and followed with abstract forms. Like Ochigbo, this researcher will also attempt at exploring possibilities of discovering an individual expression.

CHAPTER THREE

-

METHOD OF RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction

Fagg(1960) identified two types of research methodologies worth considering when researching in the arts. He referred to them as the primary and secondary studies. He described primary studies as a research carried out directly in the field while secondary studies are those which are carried out elsewhere using results of primary studies. Secondary studies therefore imply studies of specimens and documents brought from the field to places like a school's department of arts. For the purpose of this research, both the primary and secondary sources of information were used. Also used was the research method adopted by Sani(1986) which was a descriptive survey into a studio project that employed experimentations. In this case, experiments were conducted in an attempt to develop cornstalk into a medium of painting. The experiments specifically led to the production of coloured pieces of cornstalk which were used in the execution of mosaics. Also, as in the case of Sani(ibid.), the experiments were not essentially scientific since there were no dimensions that allowed for the employment of any standard statistical instrument for measurement. A third similarity of Sani's research to this one is in the identification and preparation of materials before experimenting with them in the execution of works.

3.2 Materials Used

Several materials were used in carrying out this research. They included,

- i. cornstalk,
- ii. colours,
- iii. thinners,
- iv. adhesive,
- v. cutting/shaping tools,
- vi. supports, and
- vii. varnish.

3.3 Pilot Survey

A pilot survey was conducted to determine the most suitable of the listed materials for use.

- i. Cornstalk: Consideration was given to the acquisition of the type that was not brittle or large but sturdy and small in size. The cornstalk had to be firm to allow for slicing and to maintain the shape of the sliced pieces. Brittle cornstalk could hardly be stuck on supports with glue. They also had to be small sizes in order to be manoeuvrable in representing small forms. A favourable type was obtained from the grain sorghum known as Guinea corn. The part of the cornstalk that carried the ears was used.
- ii. Colours: It was discovered that colours that were either oil or water based could be used in dyeing the pieces of cornstalk. However, oil based colours in the

form of Artists' colours were preferred for their permanence as well as their ability to keep away pests that might wish to inhabit the cornstalk. Also, since the glue that was used was water based, there was the tendency to leave smudges on the cornstalk when water based colours were used.

- iii. Thinners: Two types of thinners were used, one for diluting the colours before dyeing the pieces of cornstalk and the other for diluting the varnish applied on the executed mosaics. Turpentine was preferred in diluting the colours while a Permobel thinner was used in diluting the varnish which was also a Permobel product. There was no founded reason for the choice of thinners except on an assumed efficiency in performance.
- iv. Adhesive: Many types of adhesives could have been used in sticking the pieces of cornstalk to a support. However, the preferred adhesive was a liquid type that was whitish in appearance and that bore the trade name, Ponal Glue. It was popular with woodworkers who used it in constructing such items as furniture. It was preferred on the assumption that if it could be durable in building furniture which should last long and which bore human weights, it should be durable in holding cornstalk unto a support. It was also preferred because when dry, it became transparent, enhancing the neatness of the mosaics.

- v. Cutting/Shaping Tools: Razor blades were used in slicing the cornstalk. There were no special reasons for using them rather than other types except the ease with which they were obtained since after using them for shaving, they were still sharp enough to slice through cornsalk with ease.
- vi. Supports: Two types of supports were tried out in the execution of mosaics using cornstalk tesserae. They were, straw boards and ceiling boards. It was however, noticed that the cornstalk tesserae flaked off each time the straw board was flexed. Ceiling boards which were not that flexible were therefore preferred as supports. The smooth side was used.
- vii. Varnish: The idea of using a varnish on the mosaics was borne out of the need to protect their surfaces from any effects of moisture or pests attempting to eat up the cornstalk tesserae. The regular varnish used on oil paintings was not easily obtainable to the researcher so a varnish known as Permobel Synthetic finish used in spraying motor cars was used. This varnish had other advantages as being neutral and being able to withstand harsh conditions of weathering.

3.4 Procedure of Work

- a. Procurement of Cornstalk: Guinea corn was usually harvested towards the end of October or at the

beginning of November. After harvest some of the cornstalk were taken away for use as fuel for cooking or for fencing and roofing. The bits and pieces that were left behind were burnt later during farm clearing. Usually before then, livestock scavenging for food could trample upon them and crush them. It was therefore necessary to go out immediately after harvest in order to obtain good cornstalk for use. It was also considered important to procure enough to last a whole year because if it ran short, it would mean the postponement of work until the next harvest.

- b. Processing of Cornstalk: The cornstalk obtained from the farm was properly dried. Its bark was then peeled off and discarded. This was because without the bark, the cornstalk absorbed colours better and it was easier to slice. After peeling off the bark it was then sliced into small pieces, maintaining an average of half a centimetre in length and a centimetre in diameter. While slicing, it was possible to come upon cornstalk that had tiny holes in the centre or that was not whole. This was discarded for that which did not possess a hole and which was whole.
- c. Sketching: The design or figures to be represented were sketched on the support using pencil. The colour scheme was then worked out on the support.

This was what decided the colours to be diluted.

d. Dyeing of Cornstalk: Empty tins of about thirteen centimetres long and ten centimetres in diameter were used in dyeing the pieces of cornstalk. First of all, the colour in which the cornstalk would be dyed was squeezed into the tin. It was then diluted in turpentine. The intensity of the colour was dependent on its concentration in turpentine; the more concentrated, the more intense. After dilution, the quantity of the pieces of cornstalk which needed to be dyed in that colour was poured into the solution and stirred well. After about five minutes of stirring, the pieces of cornstalk would have absorbed the colour. They were then poured out on a clean surface to dry. They took about twenty-four hours to dry enough for use. This procedure was undertaken for all the coloured cornstalk tesserae required in the execution of any work. Even where the pieces of cornstalk were to be used plain, they were still stirred in turpentine and dried. This was to help keep away pests.

e. Execution of Work: Following the colour scheme of the painting, the cornstalk tesserae were stuck to the support that already contained a sketch. The adhesive was first smeared on the area to be immediately covered with the tesserae so as not to allow it dry up. The tesserae were placed closely together with the intention to leave as little space inbetween them as

possible. Sometimes it required that a piece was sliced with a blade to enable it fit into a tiny space.

- f. Varnishing: On completion of the work, it was varnished. At first a brush was used in applying the varnish. It was however discovered that this method encouraged a lot of wastage of varnish. A spray gun was therefore tried and found to be suitable. The varnish, it was assumed, would protect the works from the activities of pests and weathering. After varnishing, the works were prepared for display.

3.5 Exploration of Form

The works executed through the use of cornstalk tesserae sought to achieve the rendition of realistic images as well as abstract ones. They also tried to develop a unique medium for personal expression by exploring unfamiliar methods of picture making such as using water to create the forms that were represented as well as experimenting with positive and negative spaces by leaving some areas in the painting uncovered by the tesserae. A detailed description of the works is provided in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF WORKS

4.1 Introduction

The general objective of this research was not only to process cornstalk into tesserae for the production of mosaics, but it also included the actual experimentation with the processed cornstalk in the execution of works. It sought, like Ochigbo(op.cit.), to explore possibilities of discovering an individual expression. Over twenty works were produced under the broad outlines of representational and nonrepresentational works. The representational works included realistic studies of observed scenes; attempt at fusion of space with silhouettes; and stylised representation of figures in a mimesis of child art. The nonrepresentational works on the other hand included the portrayal of basic geometric shapes; compositions emphasising colour interaction; and improvisations using water in shaping forms that were eventually rendered in tesserae. A few examples are selected and analysed here.

4.2 Representational Works

The representational works particularly those that were realistic studies of scenes attempted at achieving the portrayal of the solidity of forms through the rendering of such forms in light and dark. Plate I shows the study of two horses in a landscape. After sketching the horses on board, their tonal values were imitated while dyeing the pieces of cornstalk to be used in their representation. It was not however, possible to obtain

the exact values of tones while dyeing although what was eventually obtained was able to enhance the three dimensionality of the horses. Orange tesserae were used for the highlights while dark purple tesserae were used for the darkest parts. The other parts were rendered in a combination of yellow ochre and burnt sienna with light purple tesserae acting as the highlight to the manes. The background to the horses attempted at showing depth. Blue tesserae were used to represent distant hills. They were also used to show part of the sky. The other parts of the sky were rendered in different hues of pale ochres. Part of the ground near the horizon was also shown in pale ochres while the foreground was portrayed in different shades of green. The different tesserae used were able to project the horses as solid forms while creating at the same time, a distance between them and the horizon.

A similar approach was used in executing the mosaics shown in Plate II and Plate III. An attempt was made at capturing a night scene in the mosaic shown in Plate II. The entire sky was rendered in French ultramarine and the overhead tank, the roof and parts of the walls of the building including parts of the ground were rendered in dark tesserae to contrast with the bright ones to illustrate the effect of the reflection of the streetlight as well as the bulbs on the building. Plate III shows a still life study of a flask, a cup and a sugar container.

The flask particularly shows a gradual tonal variation,
enhancing its solid image.



Plate I: Mosaic No. 1 , 1990
Cornstalk Tesseræ
59x108cm



Plate II: Mosaic No.2 , 1990
Cornstalk Tesserae
35x97cm



Plate III: Mosaic No.3 , 1991
Cornstalk Tesserae.
54x45cm

After the attempt at portraying solidity of forms using cornstalk tesserae, it was considered worthwhile exploring more possibilities with representational works. It led to the attempt at fusing silhouettes with the space surrounding them as exemplified in Plate IV and V. In both instances the outline of the figures portrayed were first sketched on board. Details were left out. Dominant tesserae were interspersed on the figures at irregular intervals with the same ones as used on the surrounding areas. These hues of tessera were not used outside the figures thereby subtly separating them from the surrounding spaces. For example in Plate IV the brown and purple tesserae used on the figures were not used in the upper part of the picture space. Of the two colours only brown was used in the lower part, but blue which appeared in the surrounding lower spaces did not appear in the figures thereby still maintaining subtly the difference between the figures and the spaces. Also in Plate V the figure of a bird was achieved by the use of red and purple tesserae which did not appear anywhere else except in the disc shape towards the tail of the bird which also contained red. The figure of the bird was still maintained against the disc shape with green, blue and purple tesserae which did not appear anywhere else on the disc. The effect of these works was the appearance of slight fusion between the figures and the spaces around them.



Plate IV: Mosaic No. 4 , 1991
Cornstalk Tesserae
50x90cm.

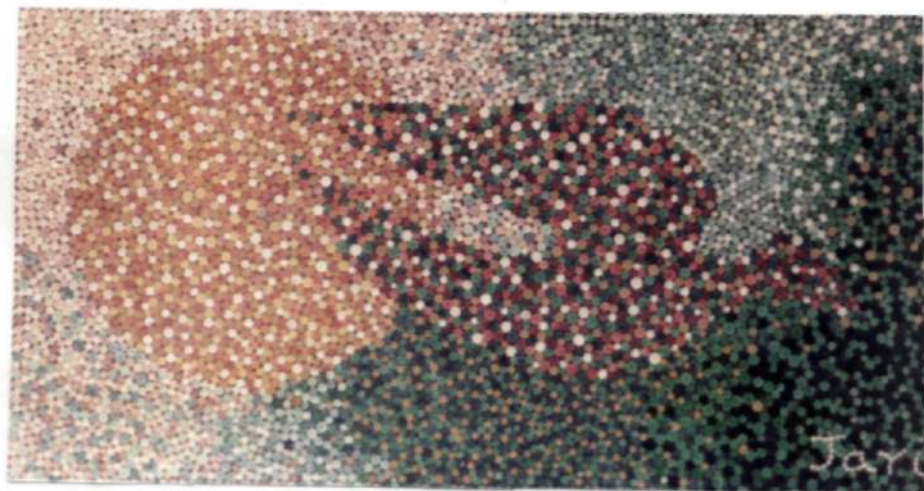


Plate V: Mosaic No.5, 1991
Cornstalk Tesserae
41x59cm

The next set of experiments was a complete break with this line of exploration into an experiment with child art. The drastic change was influenced by the need to experience more possibilities with cornstalk tesserae. Examples of this are shown in Plate VI and VII. This line of experiment was however abandoned for more explorations in an attempt to discover a personal medium of expression.



Plate VI: Mosaic No. 6 , 1991
Cornstalk Tesserae
55x55cm



Plate VII: Mosaic No.7 , 1991
Cornstalk Tesseræ
56x55cm

4.3 Nonrepresentational Works

The first set of nonrepresentational works involved the rendition of basic geometric shapes. Plate VIII continued the attempt to portray solid figures by the use of tonal variations. The thirty-five peg-like figures portrayed a source of light from the top left hand corner. The use of purple, gray and dark green tesserae in the background helped to project the figures and to create an illusion of depth. While Plate IX tried to explore possibilities with round and rectangular shapes with primary colours and green, Plate X tried to ascertain the effect of the overlapping of colours. The initial assumption was that where yellow and blue overlapped, green would be perceived and where blue and red overlapped, purple would be perceived. However, this blend was not possible from a short distance except at a distance of over thirty metres.

Another set of nonrepresentational experiments involved compositions with differently coloured tesserae with emphasis on the interaction of colours. These are exemplified in Plate XI and XII. At some distance, colours in the painting in Plate XI blended to show other colours such as purple and orange. Although there was no intention to create form in the composition shown in Plate XII, a crescent shape and a disc shape emerged. This particular painting helped in the discovery of a means of self expression fuelled by the desire to allow forms to emerge

by themselves as portrayed in the subsequent experiments.

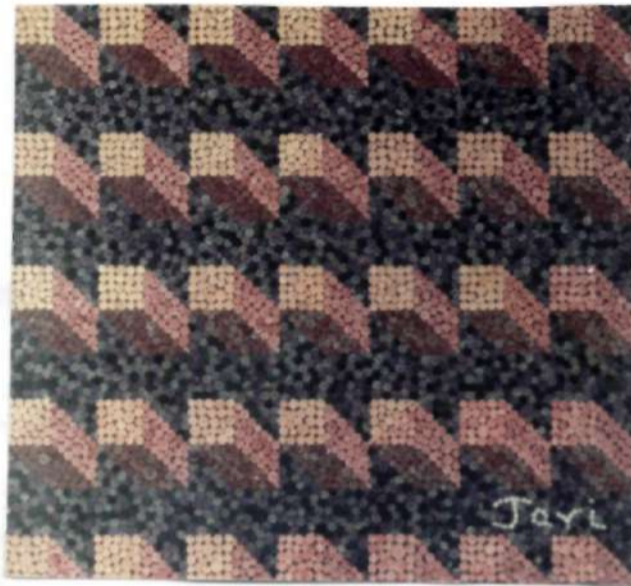


Plate VIII: Mosaic No.8 , 1992
Cornstalk Tesseræ
56x55cm



Plate IX: Mosaic No. 9, 1992
Cornstalk Tesserae
64x38cm



Plate X: Mosaic No.10 , 1992
Cornstalk Tesserae
44x58cm

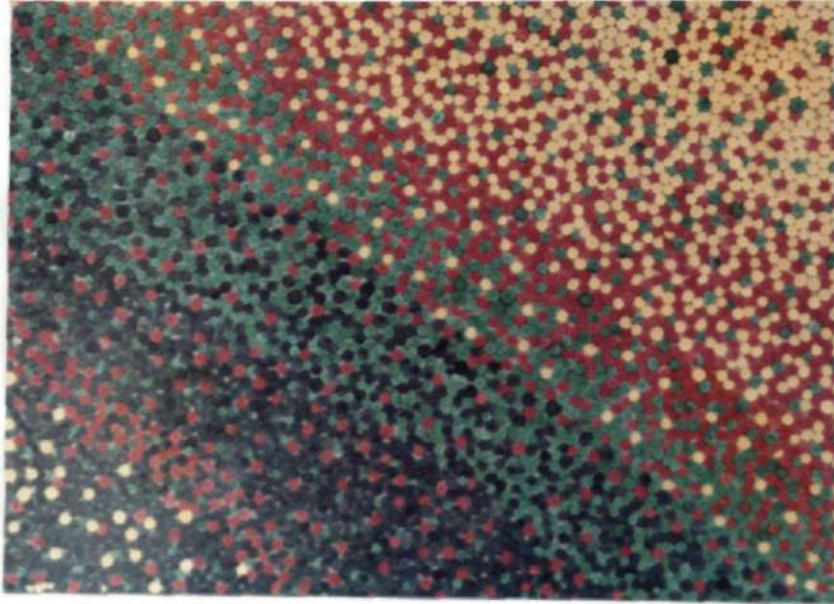


Plate XI: Mosaic No. 11, 1992
Cornstalk Tesserae
50x60cm

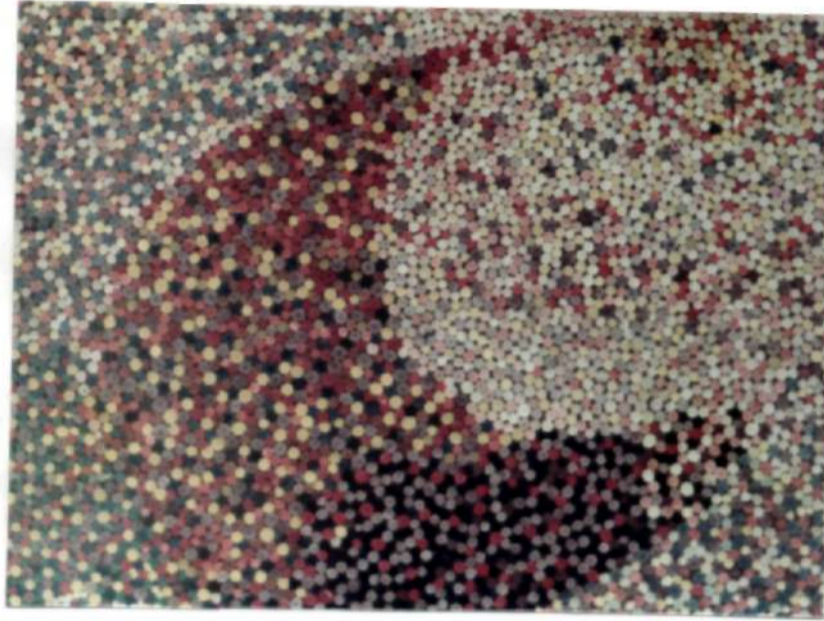


Plate XII: Mosaic No. 12, 1992
Cornstalk Tesserae
43x54cm

After experimenting with both representational and nonrepresentational forms, it took the painting shown in Plate XII to help formulate a unique philosophy towards an individual expression. The philosophy was built around the improvisational nature of cornstalk, the medium used. Since its use in painting was unconventional, it was also considered that forms to be represented by it should emerge unconventionally. The flow of water was thus used in creating the forms. A board on which a mosaic would be executed was first defaced with small quantity of water. The water was then controlled to form an acceptable pattern on the board. This pattern was outlined with pencil and then the water mopped up and the board left to dry. The process was repeated when the board was dry so as to have another pattern to overlap the first one. Plate XIII was however an exception where only the first pattern was portrayed and where the shape of the tesserae was different. This type of shaping was discarded because of the fragility of the tips of the tesserae.

The patterns created were usually depicted with primary colours and where they overlapped, the colour that should emerge as a result of the overlap was portrayed. For instance, green represented the overlap between blue and yellow. The other spaces surrounding these patterns were interspersed with different tinted hues of secondary and, on few occasions, primary colours. Plate XIV, XV and XVI show examples of this set of experiments.

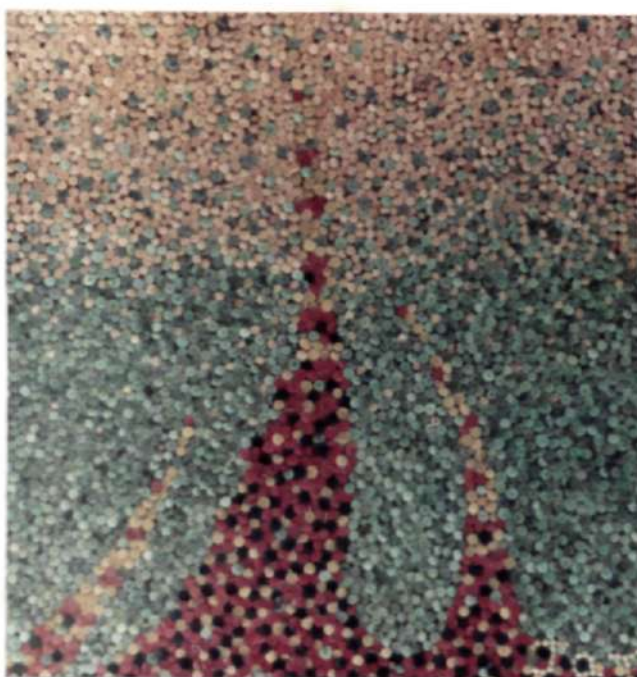


Plate XIII: Mosaic No. 13 , 1993
Cornstalk Tesserae
53x50cm

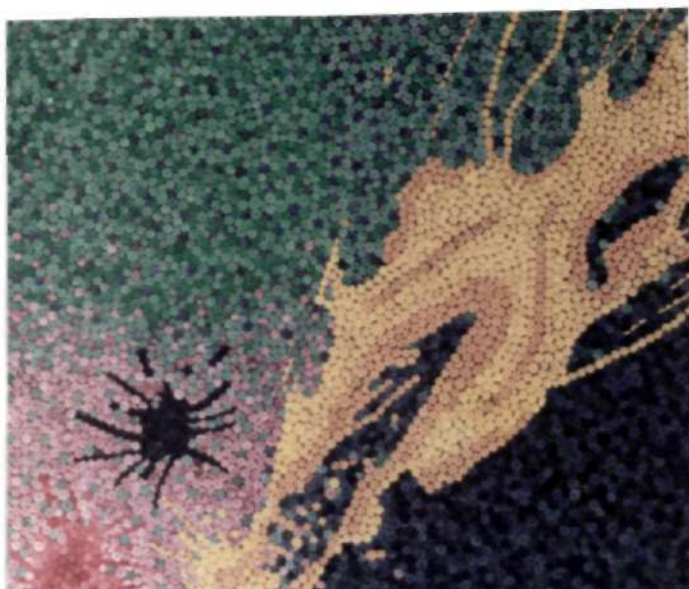


Plate XIV: Mosaic No. 14 , 1993
Cornstalk Tesserae
49x55cm



Plate XV: Mosaic No.15 , 1993
Cornstalk Tesserae
51x55cm



Plate XVI: Mosaic No.16 , 1993
Cornstalk Tesserae
56x50cm

Another set followed this approach of creating forms. However, it differed only in the sense that some parts of the board were left bare without tesserae as shown in Plate XVII. Plate XVIII shows similarity with Plate XVII except in the empty spaces which were designed with different motifs.

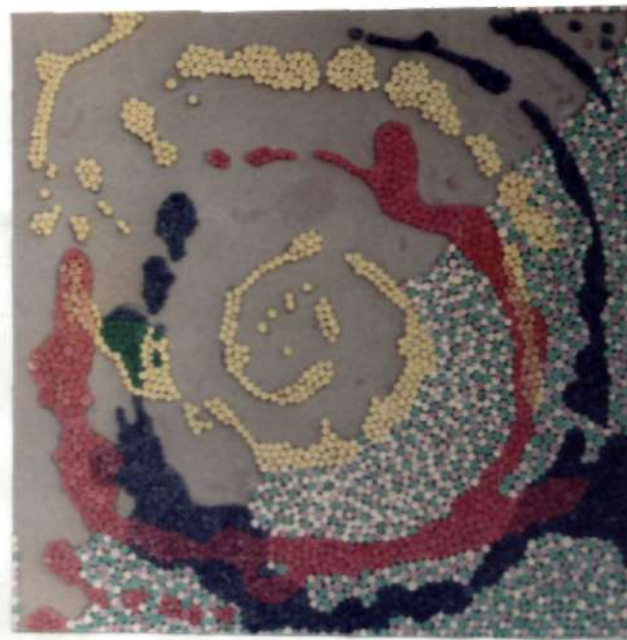


Plate XVII: Mosaic No.17 , 1993
Cornstalk Tesserae
54x55cm



Plate XVIII: Mosaic No. 18 , 1994
Cornstalk Tesserae
52x56cm

The works analysed illustrate how flexible cornstalk is as a medium for manipulation in painting. The varied means of expression through its employment were not exhausted. Different means continue to emerge.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The possibilities of cornstalk being developed into a medium of painting became apparent when initially it was processed as an instructional material to be used in the classroom for the teaching of mosaic execution on walls. It became evident after a few demonstrations that a new medium of painting could be developed because the cornstalk turned up with unique qualities of its own. In order to help develop this medium, research questions were raised as follows,

- i. can all cornstalk be sliced without breaking off?
- ii. what types of surfaces and glue are suitable for use?
- iii. can cornstalk be successfully coloured?
- iv. how permanent would the colours remain?
- v. how can the reaction of organisms such as insects that may attempt eating or residing in the cornstalk be stemmed?

The specific objectives of the research included,

- a. the production of differently coloured pieces of cornstalk suitable for creating pictures in form of mosaics,
- b. the exploration of possibilities of creating representational or nonrepresentational forms using the coloured pieces of cornstalk, and
- c. the execution of mosaics with the pieces of cornstalk that can be displayed in rooms.

Relevant literature on similar researches were reviewed. Appropriate research methods were adopted and employed. Cornstalk was processed into tesserae, works were executed with them and the works were then analysed.

5.2 Findings

- i. Cornstalk from the grain sorghum known as Guinea corn was found to be appropriate for use. It was sturdy and the part that carried the ears could produce small sizes of tesserae which were manoeuvrable in representing small forms.
- ii. In the colouring of cornstalk tesserae, oil based colours appeared better to use in order to ensure permanence as well as keep away pests that might desire to inhabit the tesserae. It was also found to leave no smudges when used on water based glue.
- iii. An adhesive with the trade name Ponal Glue which was popular with furniture constructors for its strength in binding was found to be suitable for use especially as it became transparent when dry.
- iv. Supports which flexed were found to encourage the flaking off of cornstalk tesserae. To ensure their non flaking therefore, non flexible supports such as ceiling boards were used.
- v. In order to keep pests, dusts and moisture from tempering with the executed works, it was discovered that a varnish known as Permobel Synthetic Finish

used in spraying motor cars could be effectively used in spraying the works. It had an additional advantage of being transparent as well as being easily obtainable.

5.3 Procedure of Work

In executing a cornstalk mosaic, the following steps were taken:

- a. After cornstalk was procured it was dried, peeled, and sliced into small pieces.
- b. A design was sketched on a support with its colour scheme worked out.
- c. The sliced pieces of cornstalk were dyed according to the colour scheme. They were left to dry.
- d. When dried they were stuck to the support according to the colour scheme.
- e. On completion of the work, it was varnished to keep the surface from pests and weathering.

5.4 Conclusion

The objective of the research was not only to create cornstalk tesserae but also to use them in the execution of works. It may be concluded from the experiences derived from the execution of works that cornstalk provides many opportunities for self expression. For instance, it may be used in portraying both representational and nonrepresentational forms. It may also be used in

different kinds of experiments depending on the ability of the individual in shaping and sticking it unto a surface.

5.5 Recommendations

- i. The teaching of mosaic in schools may be hampered by the inability of such schools to procure conventional tesserae since they are expensive. Paper which have been used as substitute cannot produce good tesserae since it is not three dimensional. However, cornstalk can provide three dimensional tesserae and can be easily procured. It is recommended that students be introduced to the use of cornstalk tesserae in painting as they not only provide a semblance to conventional mosaics but also afford students the opportunity to explore more possibilities for self expression.
- ii. The shaping and dyeing of cornstalk into tesserae can be demanding. It is also a demanding task to stick them unto a surface. In order to lessen the burden, it is recommended that the artist should employ someone to shape and dye the cornstalk according to the artist's dictates. The sticking should however remain the artist's duty since it is the main part of the creation of the work.
- iii. The surfaces of cornstalk mosaics are delicate. They are vulnerable to pests and weathering. It is

recommended therefore that care be taken to store the works well after varnishing. When not displayed for instance, they should be wrapped up before storing.

References

1. Anthony, E.W.(1968). A History of Mosaics. New York: Hacker Art Books.
2. Asidere, D.(1990). Fabric Offcuts as Collage Painting Medium- An Experiment. Unpublished M.F.A. Thesis.
3. De la Croix and Tansey, R.G.(1980). Gardner's Art Through the Ages, 7th Edition. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.
4. Fosu, K.(1986). 20th Century Art of Africa. Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation Ltd.
5. Liebman, O.(1979). Collage Fundamentals. New York: Stravon Educational Press.
6. Mackay, W.& J. and Co.Ltd.(1969). Contemporary African Art. Camden Arts Centre, London: Studio International, London.
7. Mount, M.(1973). African Art. The Years Since 1920. New York: Indiana University Press.
8. Ochigbo, S.(1991). Developing Painting Possibilities: A Mixed Media Experiment with Burning Technique. Unpublished M.F.A. Thesis.
9. Okinedo, A.(1985). Identification of Local Colours In Zaria and their Possible Use in Studio Practice. Unpublished M.F.A. Thesis.
10. Reed, C. and Orze, J.(1974). Art from Scrap. Massachusettes: Davis Publications, Inc.
11. Sani, M.(1986). Comparative Studio Experiments with Local and Industrially Produced Artist Colours. Unpublished M.F.A. Thesis.
12. Standfield, N.(1956). Art for African Schools. London: Evans Brothers Ltd.
13. Stribling, M.(1970). Art from Found Materials Discarded and Natural. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

14. Timmons, V.(1974). Art Materials, Techniques, Ideas: A Resource Book for Teachers. Massachusettes: Davis Publication, Inc.
15. Williamson, R.(1963). Mosaic Design Construction and Assembly. New York: Hearthside Press Inc.