



CULTURAL FUSION IN NIGERIAN ART: THE ROLE OF IGBO CORAL BEADS AND HAUSA CALABASH IN PAINTING

Adebayo Oluwaseun Alabi and Chiamaka Nkechi Nwankwo

Department of Fine and Applied Art, Federal College of Education Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16751690>

Abstract: This study produced paintings through hybridization of material culture from two selected African communities. Hybridization in art happens when material cultures from two or more communities combine to create new forms. Current contemporary African art has been reported to have European styles infused. This infusion has been criticized by scholars to lack portrayal of African identity. Scholars have also argued that authentic African paintings could be achieved when two or more African material cultures are hybridized. This study aimed at identifying Igbo coral beads material culture and Hausa calabash decoration material culture used in their selected rites of passage and which could be hybridized. After hybridization, new compositions of material culture were created. This new outcome was used in the production of paintings. The paintings incorporated the application element and principle of art and design, such as colour, shapes, rhythm, variety, emphasis, texture, line and geometric patterns inspired by the collected forms. The resultant paintings confirmed that hybridized designs of Igbo Coral beads and Fulani calabash decoration could be successfully used as a source of inspiration in the production of paintings. The results of this study should also enable African artists to develop their original paintings inspired by material culture from different African communities. This hybridized process will also promote cultural harmony between selected African communities.

Keywords: Hybridization, Authentic African paintings, Igbo coral beads, Hausa calabash decorations

1. Introduction

Contemporary art is a wide collection of materials media, methods, concepts and subjects that challenges traditional boundaries and defies easy definition (Jenny, 1977). Wells (2012) describes contemporary art as an art that is current, offering a fresh perspective and point of view, and often employing new techniques and new media. Antony (1989), refer to contemporary art as the now and the present. Jenny (1977) opines that contemporary art mirrors contemporary culture and society. Furthermore, contemporary African art refers to the use of images or African material culture in painting (Karlholm, 2009).

Material culture is significantly used in contemporary African art. Material culture consists of physical objects which include: beads, textile. Houses, utensils, clothing and art respectively (Torres, 2008). Janice (1998) asserts that material culture involves objects that are concrete in nature. It has been established that

African material culture has long been essential and a regular feature in contemporary African art (Odibo, 2009). Consequently contemporary African paintings created through combination of material culture are considered to be special forms of art, indicating cultural identity and originality (Shiner, 1997). Moreover it is argued that combining African material culture in painting will lead to producing authentic African paintings. This combination is referred to as hybridization.

Hybridization is a process in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practice (Rowe & Schelling 1991). Hybridization is as old as history and today has become a prominent theme because it matches a world of intensive intercultural, communication and art (Nederveen, 2004).

Hybridization in art occurs when two or more types of material culture combine to form newer original innovations (Shiner 1997). Scholars have however, argued that hybridization of African and European style is considered not original and is, therefore, discouraged (van Camp 2007: 247, Odibo 2009, Kappenberg, 2010). Therefore, this study will hybridize Igbo coral beads and Hausa calabash decorations material culture used in their selected rites of passage and to produce authentic African paintings and also promote cultural harmony.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Hybridization in art occurs when African material culture is combined (Kappenberg, 2010). Current contemporary African art has had African and European forms infused in their paintings. an approach that has been criticized by scholars as lacking authenticity (Bozimo, 2012, Van Camp, 2007). Clement (2013) suggests that authentic African paintings can be achieved when material culture from two or more African communities is hybridized.

This study progressed Clement's stand point by producing paintings that are inspired from a combination of Igbo coral beads and Hausa calabash decoration of Nigeria. It is expected that the paintings produced have portray authentic African identity as well as enhance harmony between the two communities.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) To identify Igbo coral beads material culture and Hausa calabash decoration material culture.
- 2) To develop hybridized compositions from the selected Igbo coral beads and Hausa calabash decoration.
- 3) To produce paintings inspired by the developed hybridized compositions.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- 1) What Igbo coral beads material culture and Hausa calabash decoration material culture are used in selected rites of passage?
- 2) What compositions hybridized from selected Igbo coral beads material culture and Hausa calabash decoration material culture can be developed?
- 3) What paintings inspired from the developed compositions and based on selected Igbo and Hausa rite of passage can be produced?

2. Literature Review

The term hybridization is applied in pastoralism, agriculture and horticulture. In agriculture, hybridization refers to developing new combinations by grafting one plant or fruit to another (Bayly, 2004). A further application of hybridization is in genetics where belief in race plays dominant part, and therefore 'race mixture' is a prominent notion. Hybridization is also referred to as cyborgs (cybernetic organisms) where

combinations of humans or animals with new technology happens (Findley, 2005). Bastide (1970) opined that hybridization first entered social science through anthropology of religion applying the theme called syncretism. Syncretism is the uniting of pieces of the mythical history of two different traditions into one that continues to be ordered by a single system.

Hybridization as a process is as old as history but the pace of mixing accelerates and its scope widens in the wake of major structural changes, such as new technologies that enable new forms of intercultural contact. Kappenberg (2010) argued that, hybridization in art is advanced in various works by contemporary experimentalist who combined art and sciences, visual arts and performances art, three dimensional art and digital technology. Odibo (2009) gives examples of the following experimentalists who worked with hybridization: Rob Kessler who combined art and science working with microscopic plant material and Mac Kenzie who juxtaposed visual arts, performance and art therapy.

Through hybridization, contemporary African artists have also produced unique and authentic paintings. One such work is an installation of print motifs, modified from African symbols and composed into a single unit (Clement, 2013). Though hybridization is being embraced by 8 current contemporary artists, more needs to be done in order to produce paintings and quality installations that are authentic.

3. Material and Methods

This study applied exploratory research design which is valuable in seeking new, clear and deep perception of a situation, to ask questions and to assess remarkable development in a new light (Saunders et.al, 2003). The exploratory design explored the type of Igbo coral bead and Hausa calabash decoration from Northern and Eastern part of Nigeria. Qualitative method of research was applied to explain the relationships between variables and to describe their variations and their forms (Mugenda, 1999).

3.1 Site of the Study

The site of study was conducted in the Igbo region from eastern region of Nigeria and the Hausa calabash decoration in Northern region of Nigeria. This is because these regions have coral beads and calabash decorations which were valuable to the research. Coral beads and calabash decoration for these regions were obtained from museums and art galleries in Nigeria. Consequently, the material culture to be selected from the two cultural groups were used in developing new compositions that were utilized in painting execution. This was conducted at Fine and Applied Art Department, Federal College of Education Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

After collecting the specific items from the two communities, 2 samples of coral beads from Igbo region and 2 samples of calabash decorations from the Hausa region in Nigeria were utilized. This was randomly selected per each cultural group, which will give a total of 4. Random selections give each sample an equal chance of being picked. The stages of the rites of passage were childhood, youthful and old age. New compositions were then developed to form the basis of the painting.

3.3 Data Collection, Tools and Procedure

The following data collection, tools and procedures were used in the study:

3.3.1 Identification of Igbo Coral Beads and Fulani Calabash Decoration for specific selected rites of passage

The researcher collected secondary data comprising sample forms of coral beads and calabash decorations from the library. In identifying samples of Igbo Coral Beads and Hausa Calabash Decoration, observation and library research were used. These collections were documented for presentation.

3.3.2 Development of compositions inspired from identified material culture

In developing new composition through hybridization, a study was done to exploit developed designs from the selected Igbo Coral Beads and Hausa Calabash decoration forms. Thumbnail sketches and colour combinations were done to produce a wide-range of paintings.

3.3.3 Application of developed compositions in painting

Successful hybridized designs from the selected Igbo Coral Beads and Hausa Calabash Decoration forms were applied on the creative project using different painting techniques and are presented in form of a table that enumerates the number of paintings done in the project.

Table 1: Summary of paintings produced for the project work

Rites of Passage	The Specific Activities	Application of Elements	Technique	Description of canvas
Childhood	Peer group	Lines, shapes and colour	Abstract	Multiple canvas
Youthful Age	Cultural dance	Lines, shapes and colour	Abstract	Multiple canvas
Old Age	Royalty Commemoration	Lines, shapes and colour	Portrait	Single canvas
Total number of paintings				3

4. Data Analysis

The following procedures of analysis were carried out on the data obtained:

4.1 Identification of Igbo Coral Beads and Hausa Calabash Decorations for specific selected rites of passage

Samples selected pictures of jewelry and textiles were collected from library research and were classified according to their sources. The information received was presented in form of table.

4.2 Development of compositions inspired from identified material culture

The sample collected from Igbo Coral Beads and Hausa Calabash decoration in each category of selected rite of passage, were hybridized according to their stages and recorded in a table (Table 4.1) The hybridized designs were then selected and applied to produce the African paintings.

4.3 Application of developed compositions in painting

Successful hybridized compositions were applied in producing paintings based on the stages of particular selected rite of passage presented in form of tables.

5. Result

Presentation and analysis of Objective 1

The first objective was to identify Igbo Coral Beads material culture and Hausa Calabash decoration material culture used in selected rites of passage. Sample forms collected from library sources were recorded and analyzed according to their sources as shown in table 4.1. Codes ICB represent Igbo coral bead and Hausa calabash decoration respectively. Furthermore, IB stands for Igbo bead and HC stands for Hausa calabash per each selected rite of passage. These samples were numbered 1 to 3 and later coded as shown in Table1.

Table 2: Study regions and number of samples

Rite of passage	CODE IB	No of samples	Sample code
	Igbo Beads		ICB Igbo Coral Beads
Childhood	IB 1	2	ICB 1a ICB 1b
Youthful age	IB 2	2	ICB 2a ICB 2b
Old age	IB 3	2	ICB 3a ICB 3b
Childhood	HC Hausa Calabash		HCB Hausa Calabash
	HC 1	2	Decoration
Youthful age	HC 2	2	HCD 1a HCD 1b
Old age	HC 3	2	HCD 2a HCD 2b HCD 3a HCD 3b
			Total 12 Samples

The analysis of the forms identified was done as per the selected rite of passage. The analysis is presented hereafter.

Selected material culture from the two communities used during childhood Rite of passage

IGBO CORAL BEADS



ICB 1a



ICB 1b

Source: Azuka (2014). Aesthetics typology and functionality of beads among peoples of Igbo in Nigeria

Date collected: 1ST October 2023

Descriptions: ICB 1a and ICB 1b collected from Igbo beads were collars of linear beaded shapes. While ICB 1b they are circular and oval in nature with smooth colour beads made of plastic. These colours comprise of red and orange

HAUSA CALABASH DECORATIONS



HCD 1b

HCD 1a



Source: Babagana (2021) Calabash decoration in Northern Nigeria
Date collected: 1ST October 2023

Descriptions: HCD 1a has geometric designs organized in conical patterns dot shapes with natural orange colours while HCD 1b has floral designs geometric patterns in vatical and horizontal shapes with natural orange colour.

Selected material culture from the two communities used during youthful Stage Rite of passage

IGBO CORAL BEADS



ICB 2a



ICB 2b

Source: Azuka (2014). Aesthetics typology and functionality of beads among peoples of Igbo in Nigeria

Date collected: 1ST October 2023

Descriptions: ICB 2a and ICB 2b collected from Igbo beads were collars of linear beaded shapes. While ICB 2b they are circular and oval in nature with smooth colour beads made of plastic. These colours comprise of red and orange

HAUSA CALABASH DECORATIONS



HCD 2a



HCD 2b

Source: Babagana (2021). Calabash decoration in Northern

Nigeria

Date collected: 1ST October 2023

Descriptions: HCD 2a are designs with floral and abstract designs in rectangular patterns arranged in a linear vertical way with black lines respectively while HCD 2b entails abstract lines and has floral designs and geometric patterns with black stripes and light orange predominant colour of the calabash.

Selected material culture from the two communities used during old age Rite of passage

IGBO CORAL BEADS



ICB 3a



ICB 3b

Source Ibeabuchi (2012). Bead making and ornamentation in Nigeria

(accessed
:

28th

of

June

2012

Date collected: 1ST October 2023

Descriptions: ICB 3a and ICB 3b are jewelry for upper ear with intricate patterns and triangular shapes at the bottom, simple circular necklaces and bangles with linear patterns which have bright colours. The items are made of smooth plastic colour beads. ICB 3b consists of several necklaces with red colour.

HAUSA CALABASH DECORATIONS



HCD 3a



HCD

Nigeria

Source Babagana (2021) Calabash decoration in Northern

Date collected: 1st October 2023

Descriptions: HCD 3a are rectangular and circular patterns arranged in a linear vertical way with white and orange colours respectively. HCD 3b consists of zig zag lines abstract shapes geometric patterns respectively.

Presentation and analysis of Objective 2

The second objective was to hybridize the forms that had been collected. The hybridized forms were then coded. The forms were also done according to the rite of passage for each community. 2 samples of each hybridized design for each rite of passage is presented below.

Selected hybridized designs of material culture from the two communities used during childhood



Hybridized of ICB 1a and HCD 1a

Hybridized of ICB 1b and HCB 1b



Hybridized of ICB 1a and HCD 1a
of ICB 1b and HCB 1b

Hybridized

Analysis of the hybridized for: ICB 1a, HCD 1a results are, rhythm, dominance, variety, geometric patterns, harmony and curve lines.

Selected hybridized designs of material culture from the two communities used during youthful



Hybridized of ICB 2a and HCD 2a
2b and HCB 2b

Hybridized of ICB



**Hybridized of ICB 2a and HCD 2a
ICB 2b and HCB 2b**



Hybridized of

Analysis of the hybridized for: ICB 2a, HCD 2a results, harmonious colour, rhythm, emphasis, variety, geometric patterns, harmony and lines.

Selected hybridized designs of material culture from the two communities used during old age



**Hybridized of ICB 3a and HCD 3a
ICB 3b and HCD 3b**



Hybridized of



Hybridized of ICB 3a and HCD 3a



Hybridized of ICB 3a and HCD 3a

Analysis of the hybridized for: ICB3a, HCD 3a results, repetition, unity, curve lines and texture, complimentary colour

Presentation and analysis of Objective 3

The third objective was to apply the selected hybridized designs to produce paintings that were based on selected each rite of passage. The paintings produced are presented and analyzed hereafter

Project Items Plate 1:

Rite of Passage: childhood



Summary table for plate 3

Title of the painting	Beautiful childhood
Technique	Abstract

Medium	Acrylic on canvas
Size	24 x 24
Painting description	2 in one multiple canvas
Observations on the project	Good colour scheme

Plate 2: youthful Age



Summary table for plate 2

Title of Painting	Peer group
Technique	Abstract
Medium	Acrylic on canvas
Size	19 x 36 x 2''
Painting Description	2 in 1 Multiple canvas, complementary colour
Observation on the project	The colour scheme conform with designs

Plate 3: youthful Age



Summary table for plate 3

Title of Painting	Coronation
Technique	Abstract
Medium	Acrylic on canvas
Size	30 x 36
Painting Description	Single canvas, Split complimentary
Observation on the project	The rhythm is good

6. Discussion

The following is a discussion of findings of this study. The first objective was to identified and select samples of different jewelry material culture from Kenyan Maasai and textile material culture from Nigeria Fulani. The samples selected were 56 from the two communities according to the stages of rites of passage and corded in numbers. The Maasai samples of jewelry were to be of different categories of colour, shapes, texture, line, unity, rhythm, variety, and dominance throughout the stages. Example the jewelry found during birth KMJ1a and KMJ1b were beaded patterns joined and sewn on leather and were circular in nature with smooth colour beads made of plastic. The colour comprises of red, blue, yellow, black and white distributed throughout the collar.



While Fulani textile samples during birth were found to be of different categories of colour, variety, shapes, lines, rhythm and dominance distributed throughout. NFT1a and NFT1b comprises woven fabrics for clothing with geometric patterns and blue, yellow, green, orange and black.



Following the second objective, 4 samples were selected per each rite of passage and hybridized in compositions using Fulani textile and Maasai jewelry. It is important to note that KMJ1a and NFT1b selected during birth stage from the two communities were used for hybridization. This explains why the compositions attained varieties of split complementary harmonious colour, line, shapes, texture, geometric patterns and dominance. The designs found throughout the hybridized paintings process were harmoniously blended and conform to the process. The results confirmed that hybridized material culture produced authentic African paintings and portrayed cultural harmony. In line with the third objective successful hybridized compositions were applied to generate 15 paintings. The resultant effect of the paintings was threefold:

Inspiration Material culture from the two communities was used for inspiration to form a new third design. Below is an example of the development of the new form. The hybridization was based on congruence of the different forms.

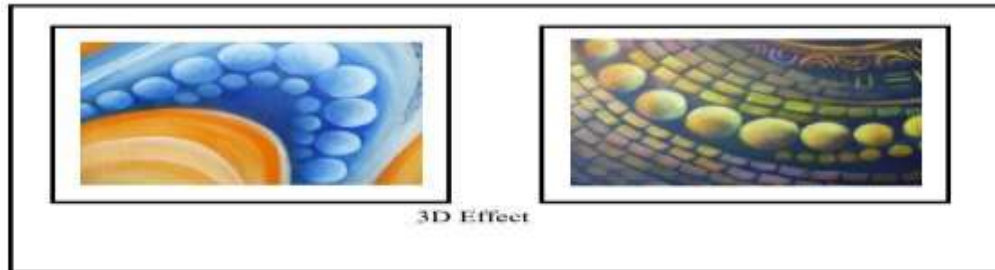


- a) **Canvass Embossing:** During the process of painting, a new embossed technique on the canvas of the painting was used as this brought out the hybridized effects better. The canvass embossed technique was created using colour wood glue and car filler in a low and high relief designs. The following shows the utilization of the embossed designs.



- b) Three dimensional effects

During the process of painting, a three-dimensional effect using deep hues and brush strokes was used as this technique brought out the hybridized effects. The following shows the utilization of the three-dimensional effects in the paintings.



7. Recommendations

The following are recommendations of the study:

1. That use of forms from different African cultures should be encouraged as this creates hybridized designs that can be used to produce authentic African paintings by contemporary artists.
2. Hybridization as a process of creating new designs by contemporary artists be encouraged as this is an avenue for the artists to develop original compositions.
3. Canvass embossing and three-dimensional effects be embraced in painting compositions as this assist in the development of original and authentic paintings.

Acknowledgements

This research has received support from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) InstitutionBased Research Grant, Nigeria.

References

- Antoney, G. (1989). Encounters with contemporary art: An education kit for the contemporary art gallery. New South Wales. London. Oxford University press.
- Azuka, N. (2014). Aesthetics, typology and functionality of beads among the peoples of Nigeria.
- Bastide, R. (1970). Memories collective sociologies. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bayly, C. A. (2004). The birth of the modern world, 1780-1914. Oxford, Blackwell Cohen, Warren I. (2000). East Asia at the Center: Four thousand years of engagement with the world. New York, Columbia University Press
- Bozimo, Z. B., & Ajibade, B. (2012). Socio-cultural environment as impetus for art: Adapting fish forms for mask production. Journal of Educational and Social Research, 22, 321- 330.
- Clement, E. A. (2013). Traditionalism in contemporary art. School of Art and Design, University of Bedfordshire, LU1 3JU, Luton, United Kingdom.
- Findley, C. V. (2005). The Turks in world history. London, Oxford University Press.
- Ibeabuchi, A. O. (2012). Bead making and ornamentation in Nigeria. (Accessed 28th of June, 2012).

- Kappenberg, C. (2010). The Logic of the copy, from appropriation to choreography. *International Journal of Sreendance*, 10 (2). London. University of Brighton.
- Karlholm, D. (2009). Surveying contemporary art: Post-war, postmodern art history. 32, No 4, September 2009, 712-733. Thames and Hudson, London.
- Nederveen, P. (2006). Oriental globalization: Past and present. In D. Gerard, ed. *Europe and Asia Beyond East and West: Towards a New Cosmopolitanism*. London, Routledge.
- Odiboh, F. O. (2009). Creative reformation of African art traditions: The Iconography of Abayomi Barbe
- Torres, H. (2008). The Factors of culture in development. US. Michigan: Publishing. Art School, African Arts, 42 (2), pp.76-83. University of Lagos.
- Rowe, W., & Schelling, V. (1991). *Memory and modernity: Popular culture in Latin America*. London, Verso.
- Shiner, L. (1997). Primitive fakes," tourist art," and the ideology of authenticity. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 52(2), 225-234.
- Torres, H. (2008). The factors of culture in development. US. Michigan: MPublishing.
- Van Camp, J. C. (2007). Originality in postmodern appropriation art. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 36(4), 247-258.
- Wells R. (2012). *Fact and rresponsibility: Approaches towards the factual in contemporary art*. New York.