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Image Making in Two Dimensional Art; Experiences with Straw and Fabric (Straw Appliqué Technique) (Pp. 521-528)

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Abstract

Image making in art is professionally referred to as bust in Sculpture and Portraiture in Painting. It is an art form executed in three dimensional (3D) and two dimensional (2D) formats respectively. Uncountable materials have been used to achieve these forms of art; like clay cement, marble, stone, different metals and, fibre glass in the three dimensional form; We also have Pencil, Charcoal Pastel and, Acrylic oil-paint in two dimensional form. Literally it is called the making of “personal images”. This paper will be dwelling on the practical experience in making personal images in the (2D) format using a novel media called “Straw” and fabric as appliqué. It will address the medium, where it is found, preparing it for use and all about executing a personal image with it in this unique technique, Two Portraits executed in the straw medium called the “straw appliqué” technique will be our reference point as case studies.

Keywords: Image, Portrait, medium, Technique Straw, Dimensional.

Introduction

The word *image* is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary International Students Edition (7th edition) as “a copy of somebody or something in the form of picture or statue”; where picture are works on 2D and Statute are works on 3D. Hence “image making in this context is the

reproduction of somebody's picture in 2D. It is not new especially is the field of Fine Arts and Design. The most commonly known medium in use for executing Portraiture is Oil on Canvas, Acrylic on Canvas, Water-colour and Pastel (Oil or Chalk) on paper. The technique "straw appliqué" is the main focus of this paper. It's a combination of straw and fabric of different colours. This combination make up the costumed part; and the exposed part of the skin;, which constitute the face and hair, neck or hand. The fabric (appliqué) areas constitute sometimes the headgear, the clothing and jewelries (Plate I).

Straw bits and lengths are used in making the related part as described above. Bits of different geometric shapes, sizes, and tones are combined to create the forms from the original photograph on a gum-stay reinforce linen fabric. The straw medium form most part of the human exposed skin while the other clothed parts are represented by appliqué of different coloured fabric accordingly. These patched pieces are straw-lined at the edge of each piece by straw "stitching" which could be finished in different or various types of stitches, such as the line stitching, parallel stitching, and Diamond stitching.

Straw Medium

There are many materials meant as Straw;

1. It could be the stem of wheat,(National Association of Wheat weavers,2007), stems rice as described by Rajan (Ray) Koshy (2002) or other grain plants that have been cut and dried. Straw is a first line materials required in the production of mat, hats, traditional fan and interior decorations.
2. Drinking straw: - Is a tiny tube of plastic or paper that you suck a drink through.

In this paper Straw will be used as a generic term for dry stem of any grain plant mostly grouped as grass botanically. They are found growing as weeds all over our high ways, especially in the Northern part of the country. The plant is about seven feet high, cylindrical axis of about $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch, thick, grows into about five to eight nodes of about seven to ten inches long from one node to the other. It is widely used domestically around the areas where it grows abundantly. Very large quantity has been reported to be growing mostly around the middle belt region of Nigeria. Usually cut into piece and used to reinforce mud/clay for the production of brick for building especially in the interior rural areas. They are also used by pot makers around

Abuja as a source of energy in firing their earthen wares. In other areas like around Jos in Plateau state, the Angas and Birons use the plant skillfully crafted together to create a musical instrument called “Mollon kara” the fresh and dried plants are extensively used for different purposes in different parts of Nigeria



Process of cleaning the inside fibrous pith

Preparing the Straw for Use

The straw medium as described above is the dried stem of a group of pennisetium specie of Nigeria grass. It is used in its natural state most times, but as an artists’ medium it has to be specially treated and prepared to different tonal values in order to be used effectively and efficiently for artistic expressions. The main feature here is the toning, which is done by burning Straw stems over naked fire. These tones range from almost white to yellow, brown, deep brown then black.

After sorting and collection from the bush, the straw stems are cleaned with clean dry rag and shredded transversely with a sharp craft knife this is repeated twice and it thus divides the straw into four longitudinal stripes called “straw lengths” these are now cleaned by removing the soft fibrous pith.(Picture above) The straw-length is thoroughly cleaned with a craft knife to a very flat state (Paper flat) ready for use.

Working Tools or Equipment

The Tools commonly used for executing this form of art is:

1. Very sharp craft knife
2. Evo-stic – Adhesive and solvent (petrol)

3. Good working environment

Getting Started

Making images in 2D form has attracted a lot of patronage for some time now in this part of the world. This paper illuminates the straw medium used as an uncommon conventional, against the traditional medium of Oil, Acrylic, Poster//Water-colour and Pastel.

Consequently, the first issue to be addressed is getting the right required size on the final material. A number of progressive tasks must be completed to get the image on the final materials. (fabric, ironed on gum-stay). This process is described as we proceed.

The Process

1. The original photograph usually not less than 1 inch square or not bigger than 4 inches square is projected by an opaque projector on to a clean white cardboard paper with the normal black lead 2B pencil.
2. The image is then retraced on to a translucent tracing Paper using white Pencil. The white Pencil helps visual clarity of the picture and corrections made if necessary of the image traced; it also makes transfer onto the final dark reinforced fabric background easy and visible.
3. With accurate tracing the image will assume a proper proportion, now ready for the application of straw. Straw is applied (cut) right in the appropriate places after the application of adhesive on the Straw.
4. They are cut in bits of different geometric shapes of squares, rectangle triangles and of difference sizes and tones. Unwanted bits are removed by applying a solvent usually petrol at the unwanted areas.
5. At interval the glued straw bits/lengths are knocked – down to ensure firm adherence. Finally a pick up operation is done; by so doing, all unwanted gum or loose straw materials are cleaned from the surface of the finished work.

Straw Appliqué Technique

The main focus of the paper, the straw-appliqué technique is true to its name. This is because the whole work is predominantly executed in the Straw

medium and finished with pieces of different coloured fabrics appliquéed where appropriate to the art work as in the original photograph. As described above, the original picture is projected and traced through a series of processes to get to the final format. This technique could be called *Mixed-Media*. The exciting experience is that the fabrics are Straw-stitched using different straw-stitching methods namely: Parallel stitching, Line stitching, straw stroke and Diamond stitching (Plate 1). Another exciting experience is that the whole work is not monochromatic like the full-straw technique (Enenajor 2004) where all aspects of the work is filled with straw medium from the head-gear (if any) to clothing/costumes and exposed body.

Most importantly, the fabrics to be appliquéed should be of the same weave-pattern especially in its thickness. This is essentially to make straw – stitching easy. Since the purpose of straw-stitching is to close-up the edges of the patches; no space is left between the edges of the appliqué and the straw bits/lengths.

The image samples below explain properly the appliqué technique.

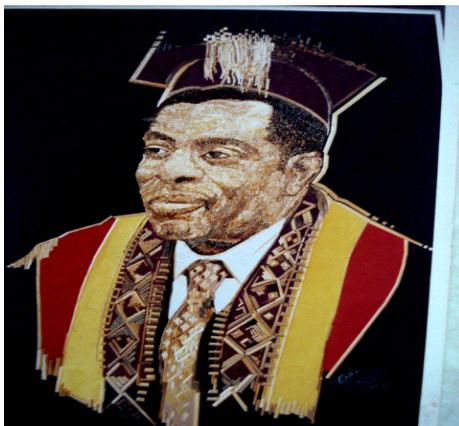


Plate 1. Professor, Nimi Briggs, Former VC, Uniport. (24inches x 18inches)

Limitations

As a novel art technique, it is inherent that one should encounter some pertinent set-backs and problems. Though the plant is everywhere but it is seasonal, and hence must be collected only in the dry season. This is so because the straw can only be used effectively if dried up. Its natural dry state is more suitable for use as it maintains its natural colour and structure. Other challenges are:

- a) In the area of toning the straw to darker tones
- b) Shredding the stem and preparing to paper flat.
- c) Only non-water base gum or adhesives are used successfully
- d) The two surfaces involved (straw and base) should be dust/and grease free.

Fabric surfaces should be void of corrugation or physical or pronounced textures, as well as having hairy surfaces like of wool or velvet. The fabric should also be reinforced by gum-stay to avoid squeezing and shrinkages while working especially on large areas.



Plate 2: Pastor and Mrs. Soares. 36inches x 24inches

The twin image above is another example of the straw/appliqué technique. Every colour observed in this straw art work (Images and background) are in appliquéd fabric, and straw stitched to define the content (Shapes and designs) on the costumes.

Conclusion

Using this medium and this technique constantly provokes new creative horizons. For upward of twenty years executing jobs in this medium especially in making Images; at any new job there has always been a new discovery. Straw bits are all in different geometric shapes, sizes and tones. It is also observed that straw bits and lengths placed vertically emit lighter tones as compared with bits placed horizontally “which emit darker tones.

Generally it was also observed that straw stems from the northern part of Nigeria when dry appear and maintain their colour, ironically they are almost white in colour. They are also more elastic and could only break at the appropriate points when in use.

Cutting pieces of fabric for the appliqué must be done with care as the type of weave patterns on them might emit different tone of the colours if the fabrics are placed horizontally or vertically especially if they bear textures with strips and ridges.

This technique is recommended as an art form in the 2D art. It comes handy in artistic expression. The straw plant is available at no cost. All the contents (materials) for a finished job costs very low and cheap to purchase and are readily available. They are also durable, unlike the Oil and Canvas images which are expensive and sometime scarce; due to the restricted nature of supply (imported) The Straw could be used to achieve any other 2D art works/designs and actually indigenizing the works from the technique.

Glossary

Evo-stik	Adhesive
Finish	Final medium x style and quality of the and product. After laying (gluing) the straw, you knock down to
Knock – down	Ensure firm grip of the straw bits to the Working space your finger tips.
Straw – bits	A size of straw smaller than or same size as the width.
Straw – length	A size of straw longer than the width.
Straw - stitching	Straw bits or lengths used to close-up.
Three - dimensions 3D	Solid structure in the round.
Two - dimension 2D	Surface with length x breath

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