

**A Descriptive Analysis of the Screen Printing “Aquatic Life” By Utom-Obong Andy Ajuzie**  
**By**

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**Abstract**

This paper is designed to critique Leo Tolstoy expression theory in analyzing Utom-Obong’s screen printing: “Aquatic Life.” The paper discusses Utom-Obong as a creative explorer, the expression theory, and analysis on the screen printing “Aquatic life” by Utom-Obong. The aim of this is due to the fact that most of the contemporary textile artists still produce their work without putting into consideration the basic philosophy and theory of art that guide them in producing their textile works. Hence, this paper is interested to view Utom-Obong as a creative explorer and experienced textile artist who had produced her screen printing, putting into consideration the theories and philosophies of art. This is obvious in one of her textile designed works “Aquatic Life” which was influenced by expression theory of art. For conclusion, the paper concludes that Utom-Obong expressed her feeling or experience in such a

way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience.

**Keywords: Expression, Aquatic Life, Theory, Feeling, Experience.**

### **Introduction**

Traditionally, art is a form of expression and communication to the society. It is the outward expression of the inward feelings. According to Orubu (2015) for any kind of art to be seen and appreciated as a work of art, it must be stemmed from feelings, or there must be a message to be passed-by and communicated to the people. Orubu adds that the concept of expression of feelings and language communication of ideas appears to be the bed rock of the definition of art. However, this expression of feelings, emotions, ideas, thoughts and perception etc. can intensively be transformed visually through the various areas of art opened to specialization.

Interestingly, the work under analysis falls under textile design and textile design appears to be one of the areas of art opened to specialization. Textile, according to the Encyclopedia of Textiles (1960), takes its origin from the Latin word *texere* meaning (to weave) from fiber. Originally, this was applied to woven fabrics. But it is now also applied to natural, and synthetic filaments, yarns and threads as well as to the woven, knitted, felted, tufted, braided, bonded, knotted and embroidered fabrics produced by mechanical or chemical bonding fibers (Encarta, in Usani2009).

The Encyclopedia Americana buttressed this as a fabric made by weaving, knitting, netting or braiding. It extended its application to the component of fibers, such as silk, wool, cotton, line, rayon and nylon of such fabrics. This field of visual art encompasses the pattern making process, rather it is a process from the raw material into finished product.

In Nigeria at large Textiles production is one area that is of great importance to her citizens. Textile production of different sorts is being practiced in many parts of the country and different art workshops are showcasing

textiles practice in different ways; such as batik, weaving, tie and dye, sewing, embroidery, printing and others.

Printing appears to be one of the ways through which the artwork under analysis was showcased by Utom-Obong.

Fabric printing is done in different ways. It could be done manually or mechanically. Manual fabric printing is by stenciling a motif of your choice then use fabric ink or inks to dab on the fabric to create designs. Mechanical method is by transferring the desired motifs or images on a sizeable framed mesh then print with textile ink on the fabric. This method is called screen printing method of producing fabric.

**Screen printing** is a printing technique whereby a mesh is used to transfer ink onto a substrate. The open areas of the screen will print on the fabric. Screen printing could be single or multi-colour printing on fabrics. Thus, this brings about the construction of Utom-Obong's screen printing "Aquatic Life" as it will be analyzed in this discuss that follows.

Utom-Obom is a creative and experienced textile artist who does not just produces her works for self or public satisfaction sake but puts a lot of thought into consideration before she begins her textile artworks. A unique aspect of her is the theory she considers before producing her works.

The artwork under study is a screen printing in textile design. It is clear that this work was expressed in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed to, can share the same feeling or experience expressed by the artist. Interestingly, Utom-Obom who produced this screen printing is an experience textile artist and scholar of high repute. It is obvious that the textile was produced in conventionality with the expression theory of art.

Tolstoy according to Scott (2002) while defining art in his view of expression theory of art, defines art as " an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience.

### **Utom- Obong Andy Ajuzie and Her Works.**

Utom-Obom is a prolific and experimental artist who graduated from university of Uyo, Uyo. She is a multi-talented textile artist whose interest is also on screen-printing to express herself. She is always in search for new ideas and areas to explore in her textile. Her choices for colors in producing her works is highly commendable. A close look at Utom-Obong's textile works, especially the work under study, it will be very important to note that every piece of her artworks becomes an independent invisible element of contemplation with uniqueness that is distinct and alluring to the society at large. Utom- Obong Andy Ajuzie is an indigene of Uyo Local Government area of Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. She is a lecturer in the Department of Fine And Industrial Arts, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

### **Leo Tolstoy as a Proponent, the Expression Theory or Art**

Leo Tolstoy also known as Lev Nikolayevich was born September 9, 1828 to an aristocratic Russian family at Yasnaya Pollyanna as the fourth of five children of Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, he is best known for the novel: *war and peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877). Tolstoy was also a Russian writer who was regarded as one of the greatest author of all the time. Leo Tolstoy in 1870s experienced a profound moral crisis, followed by what he regarded as an equality profound spiritual awakening, just as outlined in his non-fiction work *A 'Confession'* (1882) (Wikipedia 2020). He was a fervent Christian.

Tolstoy defines art as an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience. Tolstoy believed that Art does not belong to any particular class of society, rather he argued that to limit the subject matter of art to the experiences of a particular class of society is to deny that art can be important for all of society. Tolstoy criticizes the belief that art is only relevant to a particular class of society, saying that this is a misconception which can lead to obscurity and decadence in art (Scott 2000).

Tolstoy believes that art is good if it is judged to be good by the majority of people. Indeed, he claims that a great work of art is only great if it can be understood by everyone.

"Good art" has a form and content which are in unity with the ideas and feelings which it evokes or represents. In contrast, "bad art" lacks unity of form and content with the ideas and feelings which it tries to evoke or represent. "Bad art" is shallow, repetitious, crude, clumsy, contrived, melodramatic, pretentious, or banal [Scott 2000].

### **Robin George Collingwood as a Proponent of the Expression Theory or Art**

Collingwood was born 22 February 1889 in Cartmel, Grange-over-Sands, in Lancashire, the son of the artist and archaeologist W. G. Collingwood, who had acted as John Ruskin's private secretary in the final years of Ruskin's life. He was educated at Rugby School and University College, Oxford, where he gained a First in Classical Moderations (Greek and Latin) in 1910 and a congratulatory First in Greats (Ancient History and Philosophy) in 1912 (Wikipedia 2020).

R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943) was primarily a general philosopher and philosopher of history, and considered his work in aesthetics, the principal work being his *The Principles of Art* (1938) as secondary. But the work in aesthetics has enjoyed a persistent readership that continues into the present. In the years after WWII he was probably the most widely read and influential aesthetician to have written in English since Addison, Hutcheson and Hume (not counting Ruskin as an aesthetician), and to this day continues to make his way into anthologies as a principal proponent of the expressive theory of art. (Stanford 2016 Collingwood considering art as expression;

To Collingwood, works of art are essentially expressions of emotion. Stanford (2016) added that Collingwood believed that an important social role for artists is to clarify and articulate emotions from their community.

If emotion or feelings is unexpressed, he assumes, one feels it in what we called a helpless and oppressed way; but if expressed, he assumes one typically feels in a way from which this sense of oppression has vanished. His mind is somehow lightened and eased. Therefore, to express is to *become conscious* of an emotion.

Collingwood divided art into two categories: amusement art and magic art. Amusement art provides the audience with an escape from reality while magic art teaches the audience how to better interact with the world. Magic art helps us to be better people, and Collingwood therefore considered it the more noble of the two types of art.

### **Situating Tolstoy and Collingwood's Expression Theory in Analyzing "Aquatic Life" By Utom- Obong Andy Ajuzie**

The expression theory is a theory that relates to the emotional life of the artist to be the emotional impact of the work of art. The expression theory of art was propounded by Leo Tolstoy and Robin George Collingwood. The theory holds that an artist needs to have an experience with an emotion in order to express it to the viewers through a work of art. Although it is not necessary for an artist to be sad when painting a picture expressing sadness, rather, it is necessary for an artist to have felt sadness at some point and be able to recall the experience (Omuaru, Sotonye and Biobele 20016).

Tolstoy according to Scott (2002) while defining art in his view of expression theory of art, defines art as " an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience. Leo Tolstoy's Expression Theory, claims that, "expression is in the work, not the artist "while Collinwood confirmed this assertion by adding that works of art are essentially expressions of emotion (Stanford 2016). Tolstoy theory affirms that, "an artist's chief job is to express and communicate emotions to an audience."

According to (Scott 2000). By the means of lines, colors, or movement art can evoke a feeling in the viewer that they have experienced. Tolstoy does

not define art in terms of its ability to express form and beauty, but instead defines art in terms of its ability to communicate concepts of morality. For Tolstoy, aesthetic values are defined by moral values. According to Khatchadourian (1965) while also viewing Leo Tolstoy expression theory sees 'a work of art as an expression of the artist feelings or emotion embodied in it by the artist. Thus the simplest interpretation one can give to the assertion given by the author concerning the theory is that: when one expresses himself to another, the person has expressed emotional feeling to the other, (Omuaru Sotonye and Biobele 2016). Similarly, in Stanford (2016), Collingwood posits that if one's feelings or emotion is unexpressed, he feels it in what we called a helpless and oppressed way. When one expresses him or herself, he or she feels in a way from which this sense of oppression has vanished. His mind is somehow lightened and eased

Therefore, Art is a means of communication, and is an important means of expression of any experience, or of any aspect of the human condition. According to Tolstoy, the most important quality of any work of art is its sincerity. Any true work of art expresses original thoughts and feelings. The "highest" feelings which art may express are related to religious perception. Tolstoy argues that any explanation of such thoughts and feelings is superfluous, because art ultimately communicates feelings and experiences in a way which cannot be expressed by any words.

The screenprinting under study depicts aquatic creatures such as fish, crayfish, crab and seashell. The picture is alerting us that the creatures are having an expression and emotional feelings of excitements. This feelings according to their composition and presentation in the picture depicts happiness, good time, leisure and recreation, as if they had just found water after long time of dry season. One who takes close look at their creative arrangements and the flexibility in their movements as they fall unto one another, will agree that they reflect a "make merry" moment as it were in the picture.

This relatedness of the theory to this study is that; Utom- Obongas the producer of the artwork under study might have lost her desired object,

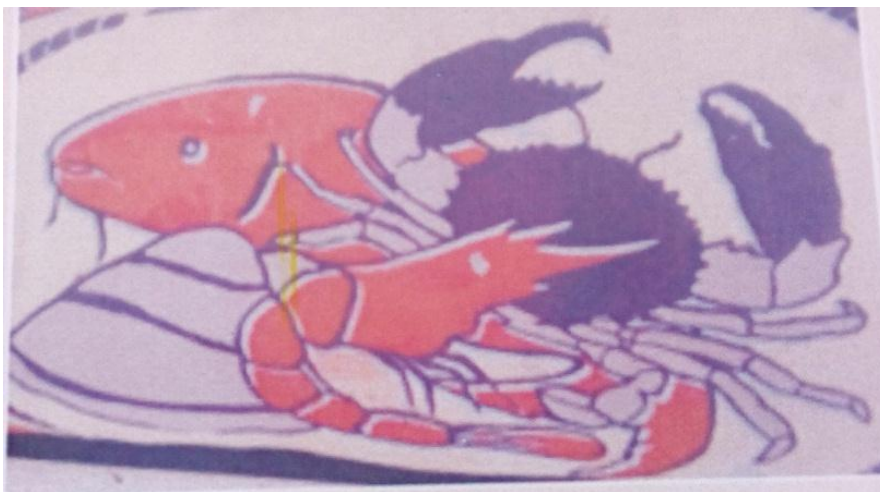
(person or any other thing) and finds it afterwards again, thus was flooded with happiness, joy and laughter. Therefore, it is based on her experience of such emotional feeling of excitement, that she was able to feel those, expressed by the aquatic lives. Thus, decided to express it in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience, by the means of lines, colors, or movement art. This is in line with Scott (2001) assertion that; by the means of lines, colors, or movement art can evoke a feeling in the viewer that they have experienced.

Another reason is that the expression theory, claims that, "expression is in the work, not the artist" that, "an artist's chief job is to express and communicate emotions to an audience." hence, mere looking at the work under study, it is quite obvious that Utom-Obong had actually communicated her experience of such emotional feelings of excitement as expressed by the aquatic life's with the way she carefully arranged the crab, on top the seashell, and the fish at the back, making the composition artistically alluring as it reflects the title "Aquatic life", meaning native populations of fish and other aquatic life. The most important thing to note in this artwork "Aquatic Life" by Utom-Obong is that she carefully selected her choices of colors before producing her work to buttress it's artistic and aesthetic significance.

### **A Descriptive Analysis of the Screen Printing "Aquatic Life" By Utom-Obong**

Utom-Obom has a very brilliant knowledge of colour, hence her enthusiasm of colors on this screen printing "Aquatic Life" is very unique and admirable. This artwork is a visual representation of aquatic creatures which will be analyzed below.





**Artist:** Utom- Obong Andy Ajuzie  
**Title:** Aquatic Life  
**Medium:** Screen Printing  
**Year:** 2016  
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The screenprinting depicts aquatic creatures such as fish, crayfish, crab and seashell. They are very significant because they reflect the title of the work (aquatic life) which means all fish, reptiles, amphibians, crayfish, and mussels.

The picture is alerting us that the creatures are having an expression of feelings. This feelings according to their composition and presentation depicts happiness, good time, leisure and recreation, as if they had just found water after long period of dry season. This is evident in their creative movements as they had to fall unto one another to reflect a “make merry” moment as it were in the picture.

This work is highly philosophical as it reflects the feelings or experiences people come across. Utom-Obong uses screenprinting method of textile design with different colours which reflects euphoria scenery to produce the screenprinting, as well to attract the attention of people to have an intense look at it. The screen printing artistically captures the spatial

interactions of navy blues and reds of the textile inks. The use of screen printing method to produce the artwork under study by transferring the content through mesh obviously made it easy for expression.

Another interesting aspect of it is that Utom-Obong carefully composed the figures considering the elements and principles of art, that made the screenprinting generally alluring and artistically appealing to the consciousness of the people.

Thus, no doubt in the fact that the materials used in the production of this screen printing are absolutely not quite different from the normal screen printing materials such as different colors of textile inks, mesh and the fabric of which is been printed on. This screenprinting depicts some feelings and emotional experiences people have in their lives. That feeling; for example, when one loses what he or she loves or desires so much (people, objects or any other thing) and afterward, finds it again.

Artistically, this work is potent and contains good skillful composition which is in line with the element and principle of art. The artist expression is based on the expression theory of art by Leo Tolstoy and George Robben Collingwood which holds that an artist needs to have an experience with an emotion in order to express it to the viewers through a work of art. The theory also holds that "art" is an expression of a feeling or experience in such a way that the audience to whom the art is directed can share that feeling or experience.

Therefore the artist had expressed her feelings or experience she have had before as she experienced it again from the "aquatic life" to the audience and it also portray so much aesthetic significance. The aesthetics in the figures, and how well thought out their forms appeared, also buttress a salient feature in the work.

For composition, Ochigbo (2011) states that composition is a lively conglomeration of functional compositional element orchestrated in colour. The sharpness in the work shows that the artist illustrated her careful observation of the photograph before juxtaposition of different aquatic creatures to reflect the title. In other words, the composition of the screen

printing was assisted by the sturdy of different pictures of aquatic lives. While in the colour application and concept, one who takes a close look at this work, will understand that the manipulation of colors to achieve this screen printing was not actually challenging due to the fauvists approach the Utom-Obong adopted for the expression. Hence, Mize (2016:2) state that it is important for artist to delve beyond just recognizing and naming colors for their inherent qualities, towards a specific end. Thus, in this work the views of the single colors and the movements in the scenery of aquatic life's largely influenced the colour rendition.

The use of different single colors of the inks actually helped to heighten the beauty of the screen printing to blend with the background colour. The background has dominance of a very light scheme purple colour, striped with a double line of navy blue colour. All the various colors used for the screen printing are derived from the normal inks used for printing.

Finally, it is noteworthy that through this creative composition, others might use Utom-Obong's concept of aquatic life as motifs on fabric, meeting logos, and the creation of other fine two-dimensional patterns for interior decorations etc.

### **Recommendations**

For the recommendation, the researcher recommends that more exploration on visual art issues and their solutions should be encouraged. This will open new vistas for creative expressions.

This work contributes to knowledge because, it creates persuasive awareness on the relevance and relationship of art theories into every artwork. It also creates room for artists to understand that the theory and philosophy of art must be considered in the process of producing any artworks. This will enable them produce more quality, meaningful and outstanding works.

## Conclusion

For conclusion, Utom-Obong's carefully composed the figures, considering the elements and principles of art that made the screen printing generally alluring and aesthetically appealing to the consciousness of the people. This printing depicts the artist experience from the aquatic life and the artist expression is based upon the expression theory of art by Leo Tolstoy and George Robin Collingwood which states that an artist needs to have an experience with an emotion in order to express it to the viewers through a work of art.

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