"How Tall I Am" In Ceramics and Sculpture: A Conservative and Preservative Approach towards Art Practice in Nigeria.

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Abstract

This paper "How Tall I am," embodies a conservative and preservative approach towards art practice in Nigeria, utilizing ceramics and sculpture as mediums of experiment. The work delves into subthemes of identity, cultural heritage, and personal narrative, reflecting on the artist's own experiences and perceptions of height as a metaphor for growth, resilience, and societal expectations. Through the careful selection of materials and techniques to preserve and conserve artworks produced by the artists or other artist. The findings indicate that many ceramics and sculpture works have been discarded in most Nigerian museums and by most sculptors and ceramics artist due to poor interest in repairing (conserving) them or unavailability of materials and professionals. The paper aims to preserve and conserve art works, while innovating within the contemporary art scene and conserve works of ceramics and sculpture to promote art practices in Nigeria; again, this paper showcases the versatility of the artist, usage of mediums and the importance of conserving sculptural and ceramics piece in the face of modernization.

Keywords: Ceramics, Sculpture, Conservative, Preservative Approach, Art Practice

Introduction

Ceramics and sculpture art are the ancient art form which have served man right from the primeval era and the early civilization, till date ceramics and sculpture remain the most solid art form which man can feel, touch and they serve for multiple purposes both aesthetic, utensils and religious worship. These artforms date back to the origin of man which synchronizes with the primitive experiences of the pre-historic man. The primitive made several hunting, fishing and farming tools for survival, the farming, fishing and hunting tools are sculptural pieces, it includes, arrows, machetes and hooks.

Ceramic is a term used for household utensils or breakable objects meant for daily activities among family members in the home. It is any of the various hard, brittle, heat resistant and corrosion resistant materials made by shaping and then firing an inorganic, nonmetallic material, such as clay, at a high temperature, Sometimes, kaolin is mixed with clay for ceramics wares production. Common examples are earthenware, porcelain, and brick. The earliest ceramics made by humans were fired clay bricks used for building house walls and other structures. Other pottery objects such as pots, vessels, vases and figurines were made from clay, either by itself or mixed with other materials like silica, hardened by sintering in fire. Later, ceramics were glazed and fired to create smooth, colored surfaces, decreasing porosity through the use of glassy, amorphous ceramic coatings on top of the crystalline ceramic substrates. Ceramics now include domestic, industrial, and building products.

According to Liddel and Scott (2012). The word ceramic comes from the Ancient Greek word (*keramikós*), meaning "of or for pottery" from (*kéramos)* potter's clay, tile, pottery). Ceramics is the making of utensils, such as cup, plate, spoon, tiles, electrical materials etc. The major raw material for ceramics is clay which could be gotten primarily from its original formation or secondarily from the river bank because, it has been transported from its original formation to the river bank. Clay is kneaded to remove impurities before usage to avoid cracking during firing.

According to Subedi (2013), traditional ceramic raw materials include clay minerals such as kaolinite, more recent materials include aluminum oxide, more commonly known as alumina. The modern ceramic materials, which are classified as advanced ceramics, include silicon carbide and tungsten carbide. Both are valued for their abrasion resistance, and hence find use in applications such as the wear plates of crushing equipment in mining operations. Advanced ceramics are also used in the medicine, electrical and electronics industries.

According to Umoh (2022) Ceramic is the science of baked, fired, burnt or vitrified clay which has over the years been adapted by artists and craftsmen for the production of earthen vessels and other forms or wares for either instrumental uses or beautification of our environment. Most of the household utensils are ceramic products, ranging from jug, spoon, plates, cup, flower verses etc. the serve dual purposes that is for beautification and daily activities. Furthermore, Umoh (2022), opines that the basic techniques of pottery production include hand building technique, wheel throwing technique and the casting technique. While the wheel throwing and the casting techniques have been highly mechanized in many societies, the hand building technique which involves pinching, coiling and slab methods has remained almost the same. This is due to the fact that many potters do not have the funds to acquire the potter's wheel and the jigger and jolly machine or acquire the special skills required to use them. Ceramic wares have an important role in the societal development. They are among the most common artwork used regularly in the society. There is high demand. This is due to its breakable nature, which means one who bought ceramics wares will still need to purchase again when its broken this is because, the material is fragile and easy to break. This gives ceramic production the advantage of high and regular demands in the market and entrepreneurial space.

The term sculpture means the art of forming figures and objects in relief, solid or in the round. Sculpture origin could be traced to the early man who suddenly developed the need to improve upon his skills and to subject the disorganized character of nature into a certain level of control and creativity. This idea was achieved by carving out or making figures of animals on the walls of the caves and stones with sticks and fingers. As the quest of man's knowledge and experiences expanded, the need for man to experiment with different materials arose. Artists, both contemporary and traditional confirm the notion that there exist a relationship between them and their environment. Omuaru (2002:48) in his views states that sculpture is a three-dimensional art whose forms are tactile. It is built in space and mass. The materials for sculptures are plastic, solid or semi-solid.

Sculpture could be two or three-dimensional art concerned with the organization of masses and volumes. The two principal types have traditionally been freestanding sculpture in the round and relief sculpture. Sculpture pieces are produced with varieties of materials such as stone, fiber, wood, clay, plaster of Paris, metal, plastercing and two or more materials can also be added to produce a sculpture piece in what is referred to as sculpture mix-media. Sculpture could be produced by casting, molding, carving and assemblage of materials. Variety of tools are used depending on the material adopted. The production of a sculpture piece demands the knowledge, creativity and experimentation.

According to Brown (2006), some sculptors, unlike their predecessors of little more than a century ago, clearly do not feel bound either by academic formulas or by the weight of cultural tradition to a common mode of representing. Arleo (2004) insists that "sometimes a work of art is more deeply into us when it has no specific features and so resonate as an archetype'. It is not enough to only render the shape, size and position in space. One must also think of its intrinsic nature: its purpose, meaning, and how it feels to touch, knowing the texture, temperature, depth, and opacity of the medium bring intimacy. Many natural media are manageable because there is a sort of natural economy in doing things and seeing the result in a few days or within a few minute, while the instinct is till driving you to work. It is this instinctive drive that has led to this study's exploration with new media.

Sculpture is usually patinated at the end, which usually incurs additional expenses. Furthermore, sculptors are often faced with the problem of patinating sculptural works as a means of achieving a perfect finishing. Odike (2013:4) Sculptors can engage in execution of sculpture relief on the walls of modern buildings sprouting up in both urban and rural areas for well-to-do citizens in our society. Other sculptural pieces could be produced to enhance the beauty of the environment. Group art exhibition could also offer the art graduates the opportunity to produce and sell their sculptural art works at very high prices to several patrons of art and art connoisseurs.

In order to understand and appreciate sculpture as a product, one must know something of the relevant for the symbol. For whatever reason, sculpture may be created today, it is primarily the domain of the individual's domain. He further states that the essence of sculpture as with all creative arts, has always been the process of experience by which human ends are achieved.

Types of sculpture includes relief and sculpture in the round. Relief Sculpture: it is also called two-dimensional sculpture it could be low or high relief. This type of sculpture is built on a board, wall, or in a flat surface. Sculpture in the Round is a three- dimensional sculpture consisting of length, width and depth. It is a free standing sculpture that one can see all the elevations.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to preserve and conserve art works while innovating within the contemporary art scene and conserve works of ceramics and scupture to promote art practices in Nigeria; again, this paper showcases the versatility of the artist, usage of mediums and the importance of conserving sculptural and ceramics piece in the face of modernization.
The objectives of this study is to.

Discuss the artist's biographies
Discuss Sculpture and Ceramics preservation and conservation of art works

About The Artists

Mr. Eke Chigbundu Geoffrey (Ceramics Artist) hails from Ovogo Odegu in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers state in Nigeria, West Africa. He had his primary e ducation at state school Ovogo Odegu from 1990-1994, where he read up to primary four and left to Ojims Nursery and Primary School, Rumuji Port Harcourt, where he completed his primary five and six, and obtained his first school leaving certificate (FSLC). He then proceeded to Ojims Secondary Commercial School Rumuji, Port Harcourt for his Secondary Education from 1996-2002 and obtained his Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE).

He holds Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA) in Department of Fine arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt. His area of specialization is Ceramics in 2012. Subsequently, he attended Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt and Obtained Master of Arts in Ceramics (MA) in 2019.

He has taught Art since 2012 in different Secondary School, Emphasis International Schools Rumuodumaya, Port Harcourt. Future Leaders International Academy, Ovogo Odegu in Emohua, Rivers state. Enechi Ekuma High Secondary School Okposi Ebonyi State. Butter Stone International Schools, Port Harcourt. Ignatius Ajuru University of Education served as Assistant Lecturer (Pro- Bono) Staff in Fine and Applied Arts Department Ceramics unit.
Currently, he is an Assistant lecturer in Ceramics unit of fine and Applied Arts Department, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

He has participated in several Art Exhibitions, he has published in several Erudite journals and books, also attended conferences. He is happily married.

Artist Statement

In clay, I find the freedom to shape my thoughts and emotions into tangible forms, my ceramics are a blend of function and expression, where texture, color, and shape come together to evolve a sense of connection to the earth and to each other, Each piece is a reflection of the imperfect beauty found in nature raw, organic and full of character.

Through ceramics, I explore the boundaries of form and utility, spark curiosity, handmade and the everyday.

Dr. Johnson Bekwele Wiche (Sculptor Artist)

Dr. Johnson Bekwele Wiche was born into the family of Late Chief Alfred Obiandu Nsirim Wiche and Late Mrs. Mercy Egoigwe Wiche in Omuosei, Omuchetu, Omagwa, Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State.

He attended St. Martins State School Omagwa between 1995 to 2000, County Grammar School Ikwerre/Etche between 2000 to 2006, Community Secondary School Omagwa between 2006 to 2007 and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Then Rivers State College of Education an affiliate to University of Ibadan between 2008 to 2012 for his Bachelor's Degree. Johnson is a Master Degree and a doctorate degree (Ph.D) holder in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Department of Fine and Applied Art specializing in Sculpture.

Dr. Johnson is a creative sculptor and an industrious artist who love to work with all available materials such as metals, fiber glass, wood, he also synergies with two or more media respectively, During His Undergraduate studies, he undergoes a six months industrial training at Nature Art (Arts/Fountain) Industrial training, 46 Airport Road, Rumuodumaya, Port Harcourt where he was trained in sculpture, fountain building and fabrications of nozzles. He has taught art in different schools due to his love for teaching. Such as Model Secondary School, Isiokpo Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State, Ihuoma Comprehensive Secondary School Omagwa Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State, Merit Foundation Secondary School, Hiltop Road, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Caleb and Sophia International School Omagwa, Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State Model Secondary School, Isiokpo and Diocese of Ikwerre Anglican Secondary School Isiokpo, Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State. Dr. Johnson has participated in many art exhibitions both group and solo, he is happily married with children.

Artist Statement

Sculpture is the most solid form of art which brings the taught into reality, preserve history, serves as a means of communication and beautify our environment.

Conceptual Analysis

How tall I am

The phrase “How tall I am” is used as a metaphor to describe the ceramics and sculpture artist’s strengths, understanding of forms and skills to produce and repair art piece no matter how bad the damages could be, in this context is not to measure the height of the artists, but to describe the skills and the extent in which the artists can produce works of arts. In most prevailing issues, most ceramists and sculptors usually abandon their broken or damaged work due to poor knowledge of preservation and maintenance. The aspect of maintenance culture should be seen in Fine and Applied Art department in Nigeria and diaspora to imbibe on the students and teachers the habit of conservation, preservation and maintenance culture which will drastically promote art and culture and increase art production. How tall I am is a metaphor used in describing the artists abilities to repair and preserve damaged sculpture and ceramics artworks to be functional.

Preservation and conservation of art works

Preservation and conservation of art works is an aspect of art practice which have not received much attention from artists, National Commission for Museum and Monument, national Gallery of Art and the Federal and State Government owned Art museums. Lack of preservation and conservation has caused a lot of damaged on artworks in most museums and galleries in Nigeria, thereby destroying our historical and cultural heritage. Preservation and conservation are two distinct approaches to protecting natural resources and cultural heritage, often distinguished by the level of human intervention allowed. Conservation focuses on the sustainable use and management of resources to ensure their availability for the future, while preservation seeks to maintain areas or objects in their pristine, untouched state, prohibiting human development.

In the field of Visual Art, the term conservation is concerned with the protection of artworks to prevent damages, to prevent overexploitation, destruction, or neglect. It allows for human use but emphasizes sustainability, aiming to balance human needs with environmental protection. Preservation is the act of keeping something in its original, existing state, often with minimal to no human intervention. It aims to protect nature from any form of development, commercial activity, or exploitation, focusing on its intrinsic value rather than its utility.

According to Uche (2024) Preventive conservation is defined as all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss" (ICOM-CC, 2008, l 25). Preventive conservation processes are conducted on the environment surrounding an object or a collection of objects. This means that preventive conservation measures are not done directly on the object.

Process of Repairing Damaged or Broken Ceramics and Sculpture Artworks

Before repairing any broken piece, it is crucial for you to assess it in other to understand and determine the extent of damage. Examine the damage carefully, identify all broken piece if it is a hairline cracks, partial chips, or flakes or full breakage into multiple piece. Also check for the powdery areas and ensure clean edges, check if the base and neck are stable enough to carry the weight after repair, check for missing parts and if the motifs are damaged or distorted.

1. Assessing the nature of the piece: Assessing the nature of the piece you want to repair is very important as a sculptor or a ceramics artist, on the field of repairing broken piece of sculpture or ceramics or any other materials like plaster of Paris (P O P), because it will enable you to know the materials used in producing it and decides on the materials you will use as repair method, estimate materials needed, and determining the feasibility of restoring its original appearance or modifying.

2. Cleaning the surface of the broken piece: Cleaning the surface of the broken piece is very important before reassembling or gluing any broken object. Wipe the broken edges gently with a dry object either a brush or soft cloth to remove dust or loose particles, but I would prefer using brush to remove dust. Ceramics are sometimes porous and dusty, even some

other materials like plaster of Paris which are more porous and chalky, so moisture can affect how well adhesive or fillers bond.

When cleaning a broken piece, it is essential for you to use something soft like, painting brush to gently remove dust and also be careful not to brush it too hard because some other materials like plaster of Paris are brittle, so when cleaning a broken piece made from such a material, you need to be extremely careful not brush it too hard to avoid unnecessary damage. Make sure that those contact points where the glue will be applied are completely free from dust, oil, or moisture so that it will bond very well, if necessary after cleaning, let all the parts air-dry fully before applying glue or filler. In Sculpture, for instance, carefully join the broken parts and weld each parts in metal sculpture and use resin, catalyst and accelerator and matt to mend a fiber glass sculpture.

3. Dry Fitting the Piece: Before you glue any piece together make sure you fit it in first without gluing to ensure correct alignment. Dry fitting simply means putting the broken pieces of the vase or sculpture without using any glue or adhesive, just like a puzzle. This helps you to identify which piece goes where before committing the glue and also helps avoid unnecessary mistakes during the actual fixing, if possible you can number the pieces slightly using a pencil. Doing this, it ensures a smoother and cleaner final repair.

4. Application of Adhesive Joining Sculpture and Ceramics Works: Application of adhesive is a very crucial step to take when working on a broken piece, because the material used in producing the work determines the kind of adhesive or joining. In metal and fiber glass sculpture, adhesive is not needed. But in ceramics works, adhesive is very important. For a broken ceramic ware, you use grog (a grinded bisque fired ware) and top bond, but when you are working on different material like, plaster of Paris you use a raw plaster of Paris and mix with top bond or you can use other material like, filler. When applying your adhesive make sure all the piece is free from dust, you can also sandpaper the edges to improve adhesion if necessary. After gluing you can hold it for a few seconds to ensure that the piece's bonds well, then you can secure it.

Securing the bond is also crucial because it holds the piece in place while it set and dry fully, usually 24 hours for best result. you secure the piece using either a rope or pieces of fabric to tie and hold it while it set. Proper application ensures both strong and neat repair.

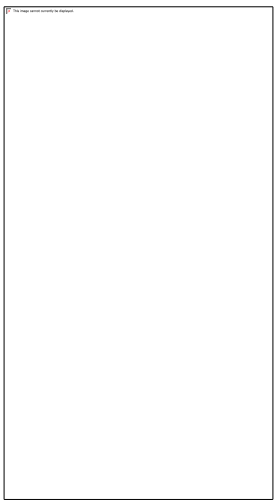
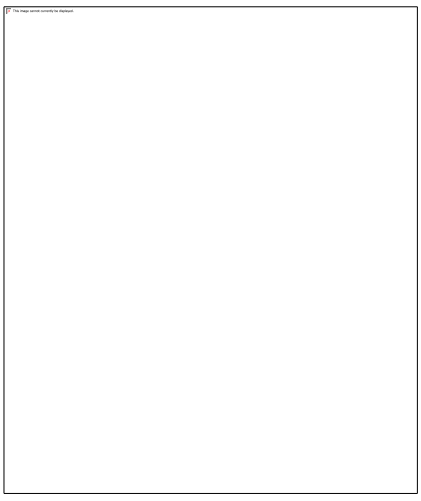
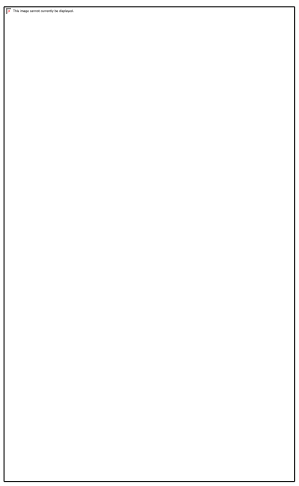
5. Reinforcement: Reinforcing is very important when you want to embark on fixing broken works, be it ceramics or any other materials used in building the piece. it is just like filling gaps or cracks found after you might have been done with the fixing of the work, uneven joints and missing edges where the broken pieces could not fit together or found. When reinforcing or filling gaps, for the best result use the material that is the same to the one used in production of the initial work.

6 Sanding: Sanding can be said to be a process by which you rub the surface with an abrasive material to give it a smoother surface. In terms of fixing a broken piece, it helps in blending repaired areas with the rest of the vase making it ready for finishing.

Sanding of works is very important because it does not only help in smoothen rough surface but also aids in blending it to the original surface and help paint or finish to stick better. When sanding you can start by using the rough sand paper first before you use the smooth one and always sand gently to avoid damaging the surface. Use the circular or back-and-forth motions when necessary, focus on edges of the surface and for a curved surface fold the sand paper or you can use a sponge sander if you have. Use a soft brush to wipe away dusts after sanding, but make sure the vase is fully dry before painting, repaint if necessary or if you notice low spot or cracks after sanding, reapply a small amount of the material let it dry and sand again. Do not forget you are working on dust, so safety is always important. When working, make sure it is a well ventilated area to avoid inhaling fine dust or you can use a dust mask for safety measures.

7. Repainting: Repainting is the final finishing when working on a broken piece. Once you have filled the gaps, sanded the surface smooth, and dust free, repainting it is the final touch that brings the vase back to life; both aesthetically and protectively

When repainting the piece, you cannot use any color to repaint it, find the color that is the same with the initial color of the broken piece, but make sure the kind of paint you use most stick well to the body of the work. You can use spray paint, car paint, or colored oxide to repaint your piece depending on your choice of paint. Use a soft brush like the painting brush when repainting for smooth application, apply a thin layer and allow it to dry before adding the next, but make sure to paint the entire surface because painting just the repaired part and blending it to the existing color might not come out well. You can add patterns, texture, or motifs if there was any in the broken piece, or if the piece has varieties of color you can use multiple colors when painting then you seal. Sealing the paint is very important because it makes it more durable, aesthetically appealing when displayed, add a matte or glossy finish, and also protect the paint and prevent it from pealing. After this you can then allow it to dry fully then you package.

Artist: Eke, Chigbundu Geoffrey
Title: Stages of Mystery
Medium: Clay, Oxide and Car Polish
Size: 10inches by 2.5feet
Year: 2024

Significance of Amending Broken or damaged Ceramic and Sculpture Works

1. Preserves The Functional Value: Repairing broken ceramics and sculpture restores their ability to be used again. A broken bowl, cup, jug, or vase becomes useful once more. Saves the cost of buying a new one.

2. Protects Cultural and Historical Heritage: Many ceramic and sculpture works hold cultural, traditional, or ancestral value. Amending prevents permanent loss of important artefacts. Museums often restore ceramics to preserve history.

3. Saves Time, Effort, And Resources: Instead of repeating the whole production process. Repairing saves clay, glaze, firing cost, and labour. Minimises' wastage in the studio or classroom.

4. Strengthens Craftsmanship Skills: Amending broken works teaches important ceramic techniques. Understanding weaknesses in clay construction Learning how to prevent future cracks or breakage. Mastering adhesives, fillers, and finishing. This improves the ceramist's professional skill.

5. Enhances Creativity: Creativity requires problem-solving and creative thinking. Artists often transform broken works into new designs and it take a creative mind to amend a damaged or broken artwork.

6. Promotes Sustainability and Environmental Care: Ceramics take a long time to decompose. Repairing broken ware reduces. Waste Overproduction Pressure on raw materials like clay and fuel for firing. It supports eco-friendly studio practice. While in Sculpture, it helps to reduce hazard in the environment.

7. Maintains Emotional and Personal Value: Some ceramic works are gifts, heirlooms, or sentimental pieces. Repairing helps keep personal memories alive. Especially important for family or ceremonial objects.

8. Improves Aesthetic Value: Through repainting, filling, polishing, or Kintsugi. Broken ware can become more attractive than the original. Repairs enhance beauty and uniqueness.

9. Encourages Economic and Commercial Benefit: Skilled ceramic restorers can earn money by repairing. Household ceramics Museum pieces. Antique pottery. Repairing adds economic value by turning a damaged object into a sellable item.

Conclusion:

Repairing a broken piece may seem challenging and impossible, but with patience and the right guide the piece can be restored back to its original beauty. When you embark on the journey of fixing a broken piece none of the steps or stages should be neglected, from the carefully assembling the fragments to refinishing the surface each stages plays a crucial role in bringing the artwork back to life and most be taken into consideration. This process not just only revives the object but also reinforces the value of creativity, care, and craftsmanship

in giving broken things a second chance. The significance of amending broken or damaged sculpture and ceramics includes:
Preserving function, protecting history, saving materials and cost, improving skills creativity, supporting sustainability, maintaining sentimental value, Enhancing beauty and Providing economic benefits

Recommendations:
Due to the cost of materials in the market, duration of producing an artwork and the value placed on art works, works of art should be handled with care to avoid damage, therefore the following recommendations outlined for conservation and preservation of artworks for the promotion of art practices in Nigeria.

Visitors and art lovers should not touch or feel the artworks during visit or tourism, this will help to keep the art piece away from all kinds of insects and termites that will destroy the art piece through human touch.

Regular cleaning of the art works will also protect it from insect and termites which will increase the life spam of the artworks
In the cause of repairing or amending broken piece, use quality materials that will stand the test of time.

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