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An Examination of Kambari Patterns and Motifs in Executing Contemporary Paintings

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of African art and its influences on the 20th century European art. The objective is to situate the Kambari patterns and motifs as the subject of discourse due to its rich, diverse and aesthetic properties. These unique characteristics served as inspiration in developing contemporary paintings based on patterns and motifs adopted from the Kambari people's body markings. This paper concludes that as in the 20th century, African motifs and cultural artifacts are rich sources of inspiration for artists to create works. The paper recommends the adaption of these motifs and patterns into painting and other art forms to keep them from extinction

KEYWORDS: Europe, Africa, Kambari, Art, Patterns, Motifs, Painting.

1. Introduction

Powell (2022) holds the view that in contemporary western societies, art is a transformative agent that affect nearly all aspects of their lives. In other climes like Africa, art also plays a very strategic role in the peoples' lives and communities. African art is basically a feature of its purpose and effectiveness if not visually pleasing. African art forms are mostly inspired by imagery in the environment. The imagery are part of the ways of life in the survival and protection of the community and the individual who uses and lives by them (Rubin, 2023). On the contrary, Modern European art - cubism, expressionism and fauvism - adopts and adapted African visual idioms and forms in creating works of art (Stephen, 2013; Probst, 2022). Some of the renowned European artists that were inspired by African art forms are Pablo Picasso, Andre' Derain and Amedeo Modigliani; and sculptors like Constantine Brancusi, Alberto Giacometti, and Henry Meggs (Rubin, 2023).

In contemporary Nigeria art, a lot of visual artists a deriving their source of inspiration from their immediate environment. Buhari's 1984 study of Gwari forms is a good example of how artists' uses imagery in their immediate environment in creating works of art (Mohammed, 2014). Egonwa, (2005) reviews the work of Uche Okeke who pioneered the Uli style of Igbo traditional art. The art created were inspired by the Uli Igbo drawings and paintings derived from walls of houses and human body decoration. In a similar study, Filani (1997) argues that Ona motifs and patterns that are a cultural heritage of western Nigeria - the Yoruba people - became a rallying point for contemporary art exploration.

2. The Kambari People

Omagu (2010) avers that the early writers of Nigeria history and have to pay more attention to exploring the arts of the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba people. These three are the major cultural groups in Nigeria. It appears little or nothing is known about other minority cultural groups that are part of Nigeria's population. This situation may have contributed to the less visibility of the Kambari's history and rich artistic tradition including the motifs and other forms of bodily decorations. In the Kambari tradition, a person is seen to be ugly, anti-social, cowardly or poor, if he or she is without any form of body mark. The Kambari people have patterns and motifs that are highly decorative and developed through body makings, tattooing, staining of the body and so on. This aspect of Kambari culture is mostly practiced amongst the female and attributed to social status, religion and, beauty (Bisalla, 2017).

Such patterns and motifs are created by incising the body with a sharp instrument - knife, razor blade, needle, shells, broken bottles - depending on the purpose and situation, with the shape of the scarred tissue being carefully controlled on the part of the body designed. Vegetable Sooth, animal fats, and plants oil, are applied on the scars to heal. A lot of these may sometimes or later form colloids. The women have more elaborated body decorative patterns than the men; the first mark a young woman receives is on her abdomen, emphasizing her role in child bearing. Body marking among the Kambari are timed around women's physiological changes such as puberty or child birth, which also signals the passage between life stages such as betrothal (engagement) and marriage proper. This paper aims to identify, adopt and adapt some of these bodily-marks on the surface of the skin with different orientations - balance, beauty, repetition, line and texture - to create sketches and paintings. According to Aliyu (2017), some of the Kambari body

makings identified have no specific names or significance. They are only lines for decorative purpose. Names are assigned to the motifs as synonyms for easy documentation and classification based on typical features.



Plate I. *Shawu* (thin)



Plate III. *Nekere II* (Girl)

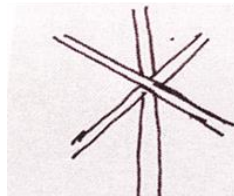


Plate V. *Kazangata* (star)

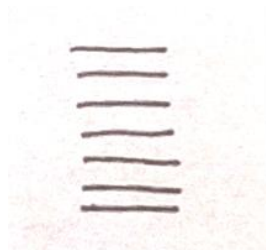


Plate VII. *Magijere* (Short)



Plate IX. *Kuzuwon Wovon* (Scary)



Plate. XI. *Kuchew* (Waist)



Plate II. *Gasa* (melt)



Plate IV. *Kenu Vuka* (Small Girl)



Plate VI. *Amaci* (Married woman)

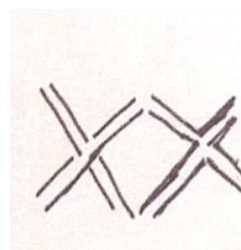


Plate VIII. *Idani* (Mark)



Plate X. *Vikyanmba* (body)



Plate. XII. *Idani Mayan* (Big mark)

3. Categorization of the Artworks

The works produced from Kambari patterns and motifs were categorized into four stages as follows:

1. Organic Rendition

The patterns and motifs for Kambari body decoration as seen on men and women's body were explored in creating paintings for this group and were rendered realistically. Making viewers to get acquainted with the main subject matter for a better understanding and appreciation.

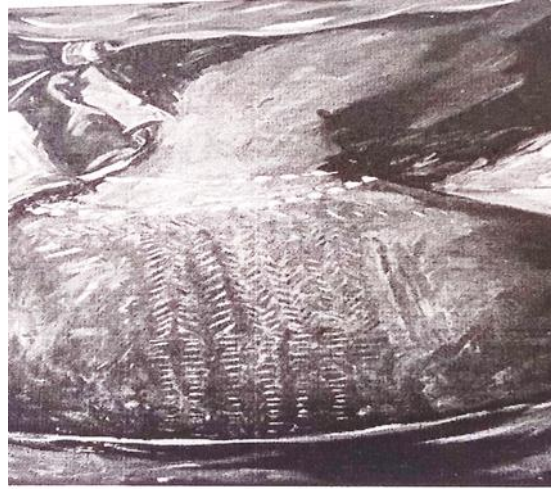


Plate XIII Kucheni, Oil on Canvas, 80cm x 120cm, 2012

"Kucheni" portrays the upper back portion of a woman back view. It is enlarged to critically study the basic compositional elements of the Kambari patterns and motifs. The application of different brush strokes and sizes to detail the patterns and other forms in yellow ochre, brown and Black tend to enhance the compositional elements; the motifs are repeated as seen creating dominance and rhythm. Lemon yellow was predominantly used on blue at the top right-hand side creating a space into the form while the body marking on the back of Kambari women is timed around their physiological changes - puberty and life stages - betrothal, marriage. This is valid to the researcher as it exposes the aesthetic linear compositional element of Kambari patterns which are a pride for a Kambari woman to pass through the painful process of body decoration.

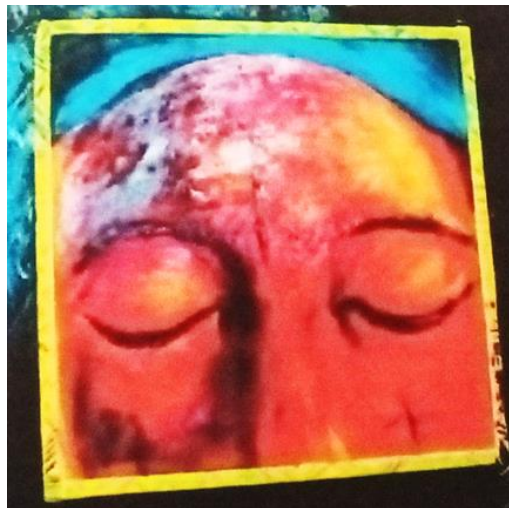


Plate: XI "Afuska", Acrylic on canvas, 1000cm X 1000cm, 2012

"Afuska" is a painting of a young woman with her eyes close as a result of the pains she passes through during the process of body decoration. The surface of the canvas is undercoated with black and drawings of repeated patterns and motifs round a centralized geometrical square shape with facial impression showing balance, dominance and rhythm. Other colours painted at random in the composition are red, blue, orange, and brown. The closed eyes are association with the endurance of the pain during the process of body decoration for young Kambari girls at puberty.

Geometrical Rendition

In this category, the artist depicted semi-distorted forms and other features of forms. A variety of lines interplayed within human forms to create geometrical feeling of depth. The lines that characterized the body of works in this group are derived from observing patterns at the back of a female Kambari. This stage emphasizes elements critically observed by breaking down lines to conventional form. Elongation and application of principles of repetition in a continuous and conscious manner were made to give a sense of individuality to forms and lines.



Plate: XV“So’o”, Oil on canvas, 100cm X100cm, 2022

“So ’O” woman drinking locally made brew from the calabash. This study involves the use of shapes in semi-abstract in elongation of variety of lines overlapping. The artist applied geometrical shapes - triangle, square, rectangle, and semi-circle – to deconstruct the form into recognizable planes. Colours - red, yellow, blue, brown, orange, and black are used in modelling the forms to create intricate designs on the figure and background. It is typical of Kambari women, who sell locally made brew in the market, to expose their body so as to display body markings as a source of beauty and pride.



Plate X“Dara I”, Oil on canvas, 100cm X100cm, 2022

This painting titled “Dara I”, in geometric shape, is a rendition of a female figure in semi abstraction. The unpainted white canvas showing a face with the body dissolved into the background with lines. Liquid acrylic dropped at the edge of the canvas that was lean slightly on the wall to allow the liquid colour flow to the other edges of canvas. The same is repeated at the other end of the canvas. Chalk pastel is later used in creating linear impressions in the geometric forms created; some spaces are left in white patches. Noticeable among colours that are used are; red, black, green, blue yellow, magenta and yellow being the dominant colour in the composition.

The unpainted patches on the canvas portray incomplete body marking and the consequences it has on one’s status in Kambari tradition.

1. Linear Renditions

This category of works created with the Kambari motifs and patterns focuses more on distortion of forms into simple, yet complex linear geometrical shapes aimed at representing unfamiliar forms as depicted in the painting titled “Dara”



Plate XVII “Kisani I”, Oil on canvas, 86cm x 61cm, 2022

The painting titled “Kisani I” is a study of different lines demarcating areas of colours - red, magenta, brown and cerulean blue. The canvas is undercoated with reddish brown to achieve transparency and smooth surface. The rough marked areas were achieved by applying glue with palette knife to show a Piet Mondrian style of painting.



Plate XVII “Kisani II”, Oil on Canvas, 100cm x 100cm, 2022

“Kisani II” is another rendition of linear composition where diagonal and vertical lines are painted boldly in black from the right end of the canvas to the left. Masking tape was used to achieve straight lines, triangular shapes with the lines overlapping. Empty white space was later filled with different colours like magenta, red, yellow, blue and brown. This painting is inspired by Kambari colours, which has to do with individual status, as indicated by different body markings.

4. Dissolution/conceptual Stage

In this case, the form, patterns and motifs are totally dissolved into a simplified form, with textural lines and limited colours to achieve the minimalists’ styles. Minimalism is inspired by the extensive use of lines to avoid the appearance of a composition from their works. The forms are left with varied lines with rough surface impressions.



Plate XVII “Kuzuwan Woven” I, Oil on Canvas, 82cm x 100cm, 2013

“Kuzuwan woven I” is a edition of linear patterns at the dissolution stage of this Study, to the right hand side of the painting Diagonal lines, and horizontal lines, almost moving out of the painting forms the composition is inspired the texture of that transmits a message about Kambari identity and social status emphasizing a reset social role.



Plate XVIII “Ulima”, Oil on Canvas, 82cm x 100cm, 2013.

“Ulima” is the rendition of triangular shape composition with broken lines in white on a black rough textured background. Achieved through the mixture of glue and acrylic, dropped on the surface with syringe and palette knife to create a rough texture. The choice of the black and white colour is based on the scars left on the body and it is a symbol of physical and spiritual strength.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the study has been evident as a concept. A concept based on Kambari body decoration that provides a source of inspiration for contemporary painting. It has also shown that patterns and motifs are sources of inspiration that would continually be employed by artists’ in creating works of art. The Kambari patterns and motifs are aesthetically appealing; they are flexible and possess intrinsic quality for exploration and fusion into postmodern forms in painting. These motifs are not confined to a particular ethnic group in Africa. This paper therefore recommends their adaption in to paintings and other art forms to keep them from extinction.

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