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# PAINTING AESTHETICS AS A MEDIUM OF CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AMONG COASTAL YORUBA COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the painting traditions and creative arts of the coastal Yoruba communities of Nigeria art forms that are diverse, distinctive, and have not received sufficient scholarly attention in terms of documentation and publication. Accordingly, this paper employs practical paintings and drawings to uncover these artistic forms and highlight their aesthetics value. Through qualitative research methods and theoretical analysis, it seeks to reveal the authenticity of these practices within the context of contemporary art. The coastal Yoruba people are renowned for their rich tradition of visual arts, theatrical performances and musical displays, all of which are colourful and deeply rooted in their cultural values. Whilst their oral poetry mimics their lifestyle and cultural values, for instance their high-life music is arguably one of the best forms of social performance one can ever come across in Nigeria. The paintings/lifestyle portrays them as one of the most creative people in Nigeria. As such, these artistic instincts have not been given wider coverage in terms of research in the hands of art writers and critics. This paper offers an in-depth study of these art forms with the aim to reposition the coastal Yoruba arts within the broader scene of world arts. However, the paper also investigates their intrinsic value, messages, and functionality. By capturing the creative thought (nuances) and processes found in the visual arts. Fortunately, this study engages with the 20th century theoretical view and observations by notable scholars whom are able to attest that a work of art reflects the artist's emotions and inspiration drawn from his/her immediate environment. Furthermore, the paper considers that it is worthy to note, the visual arts, performances and music of Coastal Yoruba and West Africa by extension, can be understood as a communicative platform that artists' use to express their feelings and cultural knowledge. The study asks if this view can gain cultural and artistic acceptance globally in this context, and what significance does it hold as a form of communication? To address these questions, this paper critically investigates the relationship between artists' expressions (visual, linguistic, oral, and musical) and meaning of the resultants in their supposed work of art i.e. Painting-visuals, symbols or music generated for audiences within the geopolitical space.*
*Finally, this paper will clearly and reportorially reference paintings, oral poetry, symbols and music, specifically, the ones available amongst the coastal people of Lagos state, and republic of Benin. This view is expressionistic and is found to be broadly embraced by artists and art critics, as well as a notable number of art philosophers and art enthusiast.*

**Keywords:** Painting Aesthetic, Artistic Tradition, Communication, Yoruba Coastal Communities

**Introduction**

The concept and expression of art through painting, oral poetry, and colour as means of communication and beauty among the Yoruba and other ethnic sub-groups of Nigeria and Africa are as diverse and multifaceted as the societies that inhabit the continent. Among the coastal Yoruba, as well as the Hausa and Igbo of Nigeria and other African groups, there is a shared belief that authentic visual art-painting and crafts are cultural products that bear the hallmarks of traditions and spiritual principles. These expressions often emerge from both conscious and unconscious impulses, driven by emotional intensity (Filani, 2005).

Similarly, communities in parts of Ife, Republic of Benin, and Owo hold the believe that painting and craftsmanship are hereditary family practices that is reserved for certain lineage responsible for producing certain kind of artworks labelled as nobility and royal distinction. In other cultural contexts, spoken words through comedy, oral poetry or linguistic expression is such a form of visual art. When expressed eloquently, such speech is referred to as *ewà* (beauty), and is believed to have the power to command respect, influence judgement, and sway decisions if wisely used or misused (Adepegba, 2005).

Among other groups like the Igbo, Hausa and Nupe, creative expression is considered integral to life itself. Artistic practice is deeply embedded in the everyday life of a person and can also determine the level of respect, influence, power or aura the person commands over others within the community. The styles of music, theatrical performances, paintings motifs and headwear among coastal populations reflect freer lifestyle which spans formal and informal settings and both social and ritual contexts. These expressions are deeply rooted in cultural norms and they differ from group to group. In Lagos State, and its neighbouring regions, including the Republic of Benin, the way a person's headwear is designed and adorned is closely tied the aesthetic sensibilities of the people. This is emblematic of broader black African traditions, where visual expression is intertwined with identity and social values.

Moreover, the beauty and interest in African art and craft are not merely in their immediate appearance or short-term display, but in the deeper cultural and emotional resonance they evoke. These art forms possess the capacity to inspire growth and reflection beyond ordinary understanding. Historically, craft design and performance art have emerged from societies deeply aware of their cultural heritage imbued with the power to affect transformation that is not simply dependent on physical prowess but grounded in tradition and belief (Henson F. E., 2021). This is particularly true of the coastal Yoruba communities and related cultural groups in the Republic of Benin. In Africa; art, language, and culture are deeply interwoven. Culture represents a way of life, and is conceptual, while the art, visual, linguistic, theatrical, and musical project reflect that culture. These forms embody the traditions, values, and belief systems of the people (Kafaru et al, 2023). The craft techniques, visual design, and language of

the coastal Yoruba represent a distinct expression of African aesthetics. These are conceptual in nature and artistic in approach. Many of these traditional art forms serve both personal and ritual purposes, including body enhancement and the fulfillment of social and spiritual roles.

While many of the found arts are designed and practiced for both personal and ritual purposes and means to enhance physical appearance, social and ritual functions at least. As Howwardena Pindell (1985) observes, "Adornment arts are executed to convey messages not only of beauty and sexual allure, but also of status, rank, age, tribal identification and aesthetics, as well as a state of mind or a desire to placate or seek protection from the environment''. In some instances, the practices of African adornment reflect elements of modernity and contemporary art, often through zoomorphic and anthropomorphic designs that implicitly express Yoruba traditions (Knobler, 2013). These cultural expressions manifest resonates in spoken word, language, and performative action; giving voice to communal values and social identity, particularly in coastal areas. Communication gives a resounding display of culture which gives an aural of importance, and also refers to the African's way of communal live dwelling in coastal areas (Adebowale, 2012). There are various embellishments and craft designs that echo musical traditions, visual arts performance styles, human body decoration; they evenly emerge from life in coastal environments. These are often represented in two dimensional artworks such as painting on canvas. However, many of these visual traditions like those seen in (Figure, 1) are drawn from everyday life and strive to create beauty, elevate the senses, and affirm cultural value (Arnason, 1985). The decoration of the homes, human bodies, and public spaces transcends gender, age, and status. It is from this understanding that Herskovits's offered his classic description of art as "the embellishment of ordinary living, achieved with competences and having a describable form". In other words, art is the skilled creation of works that aim to solve problems, reflect myths and folklore, and enhance the value of people and objects through elaborate, meaningful presentation (Staff, 2011). The art practices, performances, and music of the coastal Yoruba are stylistic and symbolic. Crafts traditions such as net-weaving, body adornments, and textile production are central. These include jewelries, woven fabrics, painted bodies, shrine decorations, ceremonial staffs (*Òpá Èyọ*), wall murals and symbolic use of language (Kafaru et al, 2023).



Fig: 1 **Abiodun Kafaru,** Merry-Making Oil on Canvas 2015

This painting, titled Merry-Making, explores the expression of forms, and depicts the peculiarity of Lagos social life. The human figures are arranged in a zigzag, stick-like anatomy, while the colour expressions are rendered in straight lines that are both soothing and captivating. This composition reflects the indigenous party culture of the coastal Yoruba lifestyle. The arrangement and focal points employ geometric shapes, achieved through a conscious use of colour planes hues in cadmium red tones, applied in linear format. The painting's busy dynamic evokes the vibrant weekend parties known as *Owanbe*, which are central to the social life of the people. This tradition of social partying is an integral feature of public engagements and celebrations within coastal Yoruba culture. As (Filani, 2005) observes, these communities paint and express themselves in bright colours, and their art includes themes of dance, music, language, forms, and skill. He concludes that they often reflect on social life and themes relevant to their socio-cultural environment.

This paper on the painting-arts, music, and performances of the Lagos coastal Yoruba highlights the cultural and artistic distinctiveness of the people among Nigeria's many ethnic groups, and emphasizes the city's unique role as cultural hub for both Nigerians and Africans more broadly. Lagos, often described generally by social commentators in art, music, and performance as the "Centre of Excellence," is vital to the economic and social well-being of Nigeria. The coastal region serves as an economic nerve centre of not only Nigeria, but for much of sub-Saharan African. The city is blessed with abundant natural resources and exceptional human capital. It is also rich in diverse artistic traditions such as *Eyo*, *Igunuko*, *Sanbgetto***,** *Egungun*, and mat weaving among other crafts. The arts are extensive and have greatly influenced residents in Lagos and people who have had contacts with the city through migration and the search of employment, leaving a lasting mark on the cultural landscape.

**The Types of Painting-Arts, Performance and Music of the Coastal People:**

- Eyo/Igunuko performance
- Highlife *Juju* and *Orin Isese* traditional music
- Sangbetto
- Mat weaving
- Trap design
- Egungun



Figure 2 illustrates how the totality of a group's social-cultural, geographical, and environmental conditions shape the popularity and uniqueness of the arts commonly found in that community. However, the artistic traditions of the coastal Yoruba are; to a large extent distinct and unique in both form and content. This distinctiveness arises largely from their settlement in mangrove regions and riverine islands, where the locally available scenery and materials have influenced their artistic practices.

Artists in these areas traditionally work with various indigenous materials such as raffia, palm fronds, plants fibres, mud, and wood. Their craft include *Agere* carving, boat carving, mat weaving, and the creation of masquerades such as well *Eyo, Sangbeto* and *Efe*, all of which portray Yoruba traditions. These artistic and cultural practices offer a true reflection of the people's heritage. Among all Yoruba sub–group in Nigeria, those in the coastal region have made particularly robust contributions to artistic development. They have influenced artistes across cultures, through their distinctive lifestyle, traditions and belief systems. These influences are evident in the paintings of several artists based in Lagos, many of whom have adopted the coastal Yoruba style and themes in their paintings. Furthermore, among the rich arts of the coastal Yoruba is *Ijala* oral poetry, a living and dynamic verbal art performed across Yoruba land. *Ijala* is sung, chanted, or intoned before audiences during social, religious, cultural, political, and informal occasions. The history, contexts, costumes, materials objects, designs, and practices associated with *Ijala* are reflected in motifs found in Yoruba carving, painting, and pottery. Like *Ijala*, the design concepts and inspiration for the other Yoruba visual and performance are arts deeply rooted in the myths, folklore, histories, and symbolic traditions of the people.

**Research Questions**

This research is guided by four central questions:

1. What are the meanings of the painting symbols, signs, and motifs found in coastal Yoruba traditional arts as a genre of Nigerian art?
2. How do art history and ethnography inspire contemporary coastal Yoruba art practices?
3. Do coastal Yoruba art forms share common features or influences with other Nigerian traditions such as Ife, Benin, and Nok cultures, as well as broader African art forms?

**Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The overall aim of the paper is to investigate, shed light on, and explore the painting creative patterns of the coastal Yoruba artistic tradition with a view to investigate the development of contemporary coastal Yoruba of Nigeria artistic tradition from indigenous roots. And also, to examine whether this artistic tradition and by extension, contemporary African painting and art is unique in its own right, or whether it represents an imitation of western styles, or the product of two artistic traditions and influences, with specific objectives to:

i. Explore the potentials of coastal Yoruba art forms with painting medium, within the context of contemporary visual art.
ii. Examine the informing theories behind the paintings and drawings of coastal Yoruba land in Nigeria;

analyse and document the forms, meanings signs and artistic motifs in arts and craft of Nigeria's coastal Yoruba with a view to eliciting the indigenous African thoughts behind them.

iii. To demonstrate that although coastal Yoruba painting-art is primarily imagistic and visual, it draws inspiration from and can be expressed and documented in multiple artistic forms. Many of its decorative motifs, traditional patterns, and symbolic signs appear across various media, including mural painting, wooden carvings such as house posts and pillar posts, free-standing sculptures in homes and public spaces, *Ifa* divination trays, carved masks, and carved doors.

**Scope of the Research**

This studio-based research is focused on exploring the aesthetics, signs, symbols, motifs, and patterns of the coastal Yoruba (Lagos State) of Nigeria and their potential links with other Nigerian, African and Western art movements such as *Cubism* and *Avant-Gant*. As a result, the project will explore the nature and logic of coastal Yoruba symbolism and motifs, while also investigating the ways in which coastal Yoruba cultural heritage and identity are preserved and expressed in art. Additionally, the technological innovations such as wood carving and improvisation methods that have influenced coastal Yoruba art forms will be examined both in historical context and as paradigms for the researcher's own studio practice.

**Research Methodology**

This study employs qualitative research methods, specifically involves practice-led or studio-based research and experimentation. An action research method will integrate theory, research and practice painting - through cycles of reflection, interpretation, and responsiveness to changes and with aim to achieve progress. Thus, the improvisation and intuition are methodologies that play a central role within the project.

The qualitative instruments used for this research include composed paintings, pastel sketches, oral illustrations, observation and relevant literature.

i. **Observation**: The object-centred approach promotes deep contemplation, and observation of painting-art works, and materials behaviour, especially when materials are combined or used in unconventional ways (Adeyemi, 2012). Careful studies were conducted on materials such as found objects, mixed –media and specific techniques of the paintings.

ii. **Literature**: Relevant literature on paintings and cultural studies was consulted through the library, internet, related journals, art books, magazines and newspapers among others.

**Justification of the Study**

Existing studies of Yoruba culture and arts (Willet, 1971) have often failed to recognize the coastal region as a distinct Yoruba subgroup with its own colourful paintings' traditions, even though evidence from arts, myths and legends suggest otherwise. However, (Ajetunmobi, 2003)

argues convincingly that arts, traditions, rituals and performances of the coastal Yoruba distinguish them as a unique subgroup within the broader Yoruba scene. Ajetunmobi's study has been widely acclaimed for its historical authenticity, thereby by highlighting the coastal Yoruba as one of Nigeria's most culturally advanced communities. Yet one still lacks a comprehensive scholarly articulation and study of its painting and artistic forms. Some of the artistic forms that are distinct and localised in the region are the *Eyo masquerade, Igunuko mask, Egungun, Gelede, Sangbetan* and myths and legends such as the *Satto* (spiritual drum). This study will hopefully, complement Ajetunmobi's cultural history and unearth the artistic contributions of the coastal region to Yoruba history, culture and society.

The neglect of contemporary forms in African arts has often been attributed to art historians' preoccupation with traditional or so-called "indigenous'' art and "authentic'' art forms. However, this neglect also stems from the widespread misconception that contemporary African culture is merely a bent copy of western culture, and therefore lacks authenticity (Willet F. , 1971) . According to (Adepegba, 2000), some commentators and art critics have viewed Africa's contact with Western culture is as a source of decline, even leading to the extinction of its great traditional arts. It is therefore necessary to challenge the misconception that Nigerian artistic expression is simply a pastiche of western art. It is also necessary to understand how the coastal Yoruba explore African philosophical thoughts, indigenous crafts, and their natural environment as sources of inspiration for their artistic expressions. Their art forms such as *Eyo* masquerade, *Igunuko* mask, *Egungun, Gelede, and Sangbetan* are vibrant, highly colourful, and rich with inscriptions that carry ritual meanings. It is equally pertinent to explore, and document the inherent themes, symbols, signs, patterns, motifs, and artistic experience of the **c**oastal Yoruba socio-cultural resources and materials for further discussion for students, scholars and art historians at large. This study is in general, also informed by the need to extend critical scholarship and investigation to an under-studied and under-represented cultural art tradition and to contribute to the continually expanding Nigerian and African art schools.

**The Art of Awori, Badagry, Ijebu – From 1500 AD to Modern**

The culture of any group of people varies from place to place, yet it remains a defining and unifying factor within societies whether modern or ancient. Around the world, cultures are diverse and have historically survived, adapted, and inspired one another through processes such as migration, economic necessity, and globalization, though these same factors can also have disruptive effects on societies. Across many cultures Nigeria, painting, arts and crafts hold significant socio-cultural and traditional roles, serving functions that include ritual, ceremonial and religious purposes. Among the Yoruba, people of south-western Nigeria, art forms such as woodcarving, mat weaving, shrine paintings, drumming, *adire* (tie and dye) and *Egungun* masquerades serve as powerful means of communication within religious, social cultural contexts.



**Fig: 3 Abiodun Kafaru Amuludun - Pallet Knife Oil on Canvas 2022**

In this painting, the researcher seeks to present a view of semi-abstract expressionism that is broadly heuristic rather than dogmatic; a view which caters to a need for some reliable understanding of the painters formal and technical concerns for traditions of the Lagos people (Adepegba, 2005). These seem to change as a result of development of all forms of cultural variables. So far, normative pattern of any society, be it religious rites, exchange system, mode of production, rituals, family and child interaction of any society is built upon its cultural background. As such, it is equally contrary to the general assumption or belief that in a metropolitan society like Lagos State is somehow very difficult to accept the compositional view as cultural, simply because of the fact that the state comprises forms of ethnics, since independence and various sub- groups who are desperately in search of white-collar job (Adepegba, 2005). Though the state is richly blessed in all forms of cultural properties such as craft designs, masquerades such as (*Egungun* and *Eyo masquerade*) noted far basic functions of integration and continuity which culture performs for all social system.

## Culture

Over time, scholars across discipline in humanities, arts, and social sciences have defined or interpreted culture from various perspectives. To a great extent, culture and painting-arts are deeply interwoven and inseparable. It could be regarded as a mirror or means through which people showcase their art, tradition or their thoughts. Edward Taylor (1832-1917), as cited in (Akindele, 2003) defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, laws and other capabilities including tools acquired by man for daily survival while the non-materials aspects encompass knowledge about the nature and rules guiding the interaction of people within the society". However, the composition of any society is best understood in relation to its cultural values, which are further shaped and delineated by historical accumulation and influence. Indeed, cultural values are typically passed from one generation to the next, though these value systems can change over time due to factors such as

migration and economic pressures. It is important to note that environmental factors such as climate and migration play crucial roles in the development of culture, as they directly shape the lifestyle of a people (Awofisayo, 2003).

*Ona* (art) and *Ara* (creativity) are terms used by the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria to describe artistic concepts and practices, which date back at least to the eleventh century A.D. (Adepegba C. , 2000). The coastal Yoruba are equally distinctive among other sub-groups found within sub-Sahara Africa, for their urban lifestyle characterized by complex cultural and political systems (Adepegba C. , 2007 ). This research seeks to explore, interrogate and document through paintings and drawings within the context of contemporary visual art. Their imagery is versed and significant, and of value to this research project than the cultural significance of the people. Therefore, the aim of this project is to engage with the art forms and oral poetry respectively. A cursory look at the forms shows that their features and geographical structure are similar in nature with other sub-groups. As Adepegba in *Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Art* describes the Yoruba geographical clan as roughly circular, and with all kind of materials such as plants, mud and wood. This however, shows the people are blessed with various materials that enable them to explore diverse art practices for ages. As (Adepegba C. , 2007 ) puts it:

> The world view of the Yoruba, and their diverse and complex socio-religious life-styles and their kinship has helped their arts to thrive. He further argued that, they are unique in most of their craft designs, which is among the richest of the African continents. The people are surrounded with water and with centre busy with human all forms of dwellings within riverine; this description is true of the maps in the plates.

In addition, (Akeusola C. O., 2001) notes that "African traditional storytellers, such as the Yoruba, have their novel forms in the folktales and '*Alo-apagbe*'." He further explains that African poetry emerged from the *Ifa* verse, *Oriki*, *Ekun*, *Iyawo*, among others. The theatrical aspects of Yoruba culture could particularly be seen in *Egungun* masquerade such as *Egun Alare*, *Isipa Ode*, like other sub-groups. A careful study reveals the importance of signs, motifs, patterns and oral poetry as seen in mat- weaving, *Egungun* masquerade, *Awo*, cult art *Ijala*, And *adire* (textile design). This, of course, is the essence of this research.

Yoruba art forms are expressed in materials such as brass, wood, Ivory and plant fibres. The sculptural traditions of the coastal Yoruba, especially the carving of ritual figures, show stylistic links with the Nupe *Tsoede* bronzes, the Esie stone images, the Owo terracotta, and the Benin sculptures in brass, wood, and ivory. These forms share stylistic affinities with the naturalism of Ife sculpture and the seated Nupe figures (Adepegba C. , 1982). Notably, most of the sculptures found in Lagos State are intended to evoke the spirit of the water goddess, often cast in alloy metals with smile and action contrary to the rigid emotionless types of Ife images and Benin forms. The rendition of the eye in *Badagry* drum images is crude and abstracted,

probably because of their materials and carving techniques, while the eye in Benin and Ife differs only in its depressed pupil.

Furthermore, the *Nupe* tradition, though does not claim any Yoruba Kinship, like other traditions across Nigeria is traced to Ife in one way or the other as noted in (Adepegba C. , 2007 ). He also states that the coastal Yoruba traditions of origin are traced to the Ife autochthonous version, and the Oyo and *Ijebu* versions, which claim emigration into Yoruba land from the direction of Egypt in the case of the Oyo and *Wadai* in the case of the *Ijebu*. Some local versions of emigrant traditions even claim that the leaders of the emigrants from the Middle East were White skinned or *malattos* (Adepegba C. , 2000). *Adire*, (textile design) a product of Yoruba dyed fabric, is produced using indigenous technology materials such as ropes, indigo dyes, and mordant. This art form is an integral part of Yoruba culture, as distinctive and meaningful as the talking drums. *Adire* design expresses the Yoruba traditional culture, (Makinde, 2004). Both the A*dire* and mat-weaving constitute an art of the women folks, which provide them with economic independence, and a means of expression by the Yoruba people. The costal Yoruba's cultural identity often features human and animal by ichnographically using diverse materials-substances, which are partly ephemeral in nature. This has led to divergent reactions of styles in *Adire* and crafts production.

The Yoruba of south-western Nigeria adopt dyeing as a technique or a means of artistic embellishment for their traditional hand-woven fabric (*Fu* or *Kijipa*), the main purpose of which is to infuse into the fabrics certain aesthetic qualities and virtues reflective of motifs, and patterns, technique of production, and ornamentation, colour, and the least an overall expression of worth. The use of Yoruba dyed fabric *Adire* was reserved for apparel and ceremonial clothing used during festivals among the Yoruba's (Makinde, 2004). However, due to acculturation through trade contacts, and improvised technology, it is still used in recent times for other decorative and functional purposes. Interestingly to state that from the twentieth century to date, *Adire* has undergone series of transformations and changes in visual outlook and status (textile, colour and patterns). These changes were brought about through improved technology and availability of dyes, chemicals and imported fabrics such as guinea brocade from India and Europe. Notably, the local Kaduna Gaskiya printing industry in Northern Nigeria has also influenced design structures.

'*Adire'* takes it roots from the two Yoruba verbs "*di*'' meaning (to tie) and *"re''* meaning (to *dye)*. Hence, it is a compound Yoruba verb meaning to tie and dye. (Ọmọ́yájowó, 1991) Defines *Adire* as the Yoruba traditional resist cloth dyed in indigo, a favourite blue colour of the Yoruba''. Historically, *Adire* fabrics were made from hand-spun and hand-woven cotton materials with characteristic indigo blue shades and a distinct odour that confirmed their authenticity. *Adire* (textile) has a long history of tradition passing from one generation to the other. It used to be in varieties of and originality. As (Barbour, 1997) observes, the introduction of chemical dyes in the 1920s, combined with

contemporary technology, allowed artists to produce *Adire* in a range of new colours, including green, violet, and brown (Makinde, 2004).

**Awori**

The artistic traditions of the Awori people encompass a wide range of crafts, including mat weaving, pottery, cloth weaving, and calabash decoration. As (Akindele, 2003) notes, these artistic practices are found not only in the upland areas of Lagos State but throughout the region and beyond. Despite their prominence, many Awori are farmers who rely on rudimentary tools, and their arts and crafts often have functional purposes, sometimes specifically intended to invoke the spirit of soil fertility and promote workers' prosperity.

The Awori are one of the major sub-groups among the coastal Yoruba. According to oral history, their name derives from the legend of a floating ritual dish that *Ogunfuminire*, their progenitor, is said to have followed from Ile-Ife to Isheri. Among other sub-groups, the Awori are recognized for their creativity and industry. They are highly organized and have produced artistic traditions that have attracted significant documentation from historians and archaeologists, especially in mat weaving and pottery (Ajetunmobi, 2003). However, the art form of the Awori peoples by classifications will be investigated in this research in the areas of themes, styles, and subjects-matter. All these reflect the people's use of motifs, signs and patterns to communicate and analyse the various socio-cultural and environmental influences of their locality. It is the variations and adaptations of these themes and socio-cultural influences that have made popular inspirations for form, content, design, and motif among Nigerian artists such as Sam Ovraiti, Kunle Adeyemi and Tola Wewe etc. It is interesting to state that the craft training in the various traditions is specifically through lineage apprenticeships, a format where people employ or engage the services of a master artist or craftsman from a family sometimes supported by a mistress from the same communities and could even be blood relations. Their art is so diverse from *Adire* (batik textile), *Egungun*, drum ensembles and embroidery among others. The crafts design and incisions embellished on all their art forms represent their love for royalty and strength among their chiefs and sitting Kings. These motifs and patterns are zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations, which are depicted on the ritual staffs and have equally helped to distinguish the art forms from other sub-Yoruba group simply because of the fact that the Awori people worship the riverine goddess.

**Ijebu (Ikorodu and Epe People)**

The people of Ijebu are equally rich in arts and crafts and have responded to the act of sculpting of traditional art forms that cut across various animal representations such as *Ifa* divination tray, *Ere Ibeji*, and *Esu* statues. The people of *Ikorodu* and *Epe* (Ijebu) produce wood carvings and pottery. Ijebu art products are associated with numerous medicinal values and spiritual and cultic features. The makers are sometimes, part time artists who only sculpt when their festival is approaching or during coronation of *Oba* or the honouring of individuals with chieftaincy titles. Sometimes they produce mask for *gelede* festival as part of the entertainment and celebration of the benevolence of their local

gods. The ancestral carvings are like citations in visual form on the very departed ancestors. A lot of Ijebu art forms have variations and are Zoomorphic in nature (Kafaru et al, 2023).

**Badagry**

The *Badagry* people and their cultural instincts are very different from that of other groups in Lagos State, but they are versed in arts and crafts, which are unique and diverse in sizes. They are proficient and their images are rendered with all forms of materials and techniques such as clay, wood and plant, and with lost wax process and forged metal into sculptural forms. The *Badagry* people also produce many crafts such as pottery, utilitarian objects, mats, basketry, traditional weaving, dyeing, embroidery, leatherwork and bead work. The drums *Satto* and *Sanbgetto* masquerades are colourful; they are decorated with cultural signs and patterns many of which reflect the fertility among the *Ogu* people of Lagos State, which can be identified with various artistic forms such as animal and human representation. These trends are so entrenched that the people open and welcome creative ideas from different sources and parts of the world. *Egu* (*Badagry*) people by all standards are very creative and equally embrace textile art production or tradition that dates back to the 18$^{th}$ century or even earlier when the people formed their various guilds of weavers who engage in various items of textile and crafts. *Badagry* drums are in various sizes and forms represented in features of male and female used during cultural festival and its functions are symbolic in nature, its characteristics is distinctive from the neighbouring settlement of Benin republic. The *Egun* (*Ogun*) speaking people are descendants of those who migrated from *Whidah, Allada, Weme* (from Republic of Benin) which are now parts of the Republic of Benin but were all geographically and politically one with *Egun* (*Ogu*) speaking people founded before and after 1900 in Nigeria, (Ajetunmobi, 2003). These are distinctive in speech and very creative in the art of craft decorations and fish farming.

**Coastal Yoruba Painting-Arts and Crafts**

The existing list of written materials found on the coastal Yoruba art and crafts are very few and the cited literature reflected on the cultral settings; thus, what one finds are mainly looking at the crafts traditions as being part of the cultural values of coastal Yoruba region, without keen interest in the study of their art forms. The discourse is not being considered, in terms of its forms, significance, and functionality, and how it is or, as a distinctive arts among other Yoruba sub-group of souther western Nigeria. Further more, various aspects of the coastal Yoruba people have been studied by scholars ranging from the ancient to the contemporary time, thereby establishing a holistic summation of coastal Yoruba history. Most of the authors only mention in passing the art objects without details on the characteristics, made of all the arts found or ascribed to the entire people, such as Awori, Egun and Ijebu art tradition.

Coastal Yoruba arts, although primarily imagistic and visual, can draw inspiration from and can be presented and documented in one and more artistic forms. A good number of its decorative motifs, traditional patterns and signs can be seen on various media from wooden carving such as house

post or pillar post, free standing sculptures in homes and public places, to *Ifa* divination trays, carved masks, carved doors etc. Development in coastal Yoruba arts has also been influenced by utilitarian values and has led to a burst of new interpretations and uses in designs, signs, patterns and motifs. At the social level this has seen innovative design interpretations in ornamental crafts such as pottery, batik, making work (*Adire Eleko*), leather- work, mat-weaving, calabash and gourd-carvings, basketry, and body adornments. The resulting images, like their ancient predecessors are painted or moulded on shrine walls and some public places such as *Obas',* Chiefs' and traditional priests' palaces (Kafaru A. B., 2014).



Fig: 4 **Abiodun Kafaru** Excitement Pastels and Acrylic on Paper -2018

This imagery is pastel painting that captures the dialogue that has been happening between western and African artists since Cubism e.g., Picasso looking at African art forms and then the African artists looking at western arts style' such as realism (e.g., Picasso) and how this is interpreted will be investigated in this art practice. The reflection, dialogues and interpretations coming back and forth from western and modern Nigerian arts will be investigated through creative processes in drawings and paintings.

i. Through these pastel drawings explore or use indigenous coastal Yoruba art to investigate traditional and modern arts and crafts in Nigeria (which were both influenced by local traditions and western reactions to them). The researcher then investigates again through drawings and paintings, if and how the stylistic trends of Modern western art influenced coastal Yoruba people (Nigerian and African) art- such as cubism.

ii. To analyse the creative patterns, signs, and motifs of coastal Yoruba art with a view to addressing issues of originality, authorship and interpretation. As a new generation artist, it will

create a new design, motifs, with found objects, mixed media and interpretations, processes etc. study, through an analysis of creative patterns, signs, and motifs will produce a unique interpretation of coastal Yoruba art addressing issues of originality and authorship. As a new generation artist, I will create a new design based on the artistic dialogue that has been happening globally since the 20th century and how, if at all, it has influenced indigenous Nigerian and African art.

**Material Traditions and Craft Practices**

(Ajetunmobi, 2003) highlights that the matting and canoe carving traditions were most conspicous among the coast and that these forms of crafts design seemed to have thrived in that area because of the clossness of the people to the riverrine area. He further argued that the people have the taste for adaptation of colour for their artistic embelishment which helps in the writing or inscriptions, decoration, writing signs, and symbols on the mats and on weaving production

However, the study claims that the indigenous combination of colouring and sign on the mats is meant not only for aesthetics but also to display only the skills of the people involved and with deep intention to reflect on their cfrafts techniques,but also to show their trade mark. Curwen, as cited in (Ajetunmobi, 2003), posits that most of the creeks and lagoons were so shallow that communities could only travel and communicate by canoe which prompted the growth in the production of canoes and boats as means of transportation. Out of the conditions of their physical, commercial, social, and religious environments, the Yoruba evolved their art forms and the medium through which they are expressed, made and practised. Over a long period of time, the grouping of artists as guilds, the establishment of creative patterns and signs, the emergence of arts traders and collectors and the expansion in the activities that called for the inclusion of art objects laid the foundation for what later became art schools. Each art school or group is famous for its style and for the materials it uses and for the medium with which it works.

(Adeyemi, 2012) and (Filani, 2005) agree on the significance and potency of beads in the context of *Onaism* tradition that emphasises the significance, symbolism and powers that necklaces made from beads enjoy. They however, view beads as a secret reserves of ritual powers, royalties, and class distinctions among chiefs, and as a mark of high grades between communities and towns within Yoruba society. Beads in Yoruba art are signs of trans-cultural communication, they are used to create hegemonic relations in cultural transactions in which the oppressor is distinguished from the oppressed in their various political forms and human identities. Adeyemi further stresses that a form stands for something by relationship, suggestions, interpretation, resemblance or association; it could be a form that reveals quantity, special elements or varieties.

It is believed that human beings have always been concerned with symbols from their earliest existence. (Jung., 1987)

describes symbolism as the language of the psyche. In recent times the research have been exploring or adapting local Yoruba indigenous forms, symbols and patterns. So far, these forms, symbols and patterns have revealed very interesting and intriguing concepts in the understanding of contemporary modern Yoruba and Nigerian arts. (Akande, 2003) observes that the costal Yoruba sub-group, practise rites and rituals that reflect the hallmark of the worship of water deities as well as respects for gods and goddesses of water. In addition, Oyefolu further eloraborates that the coastal region is a melting pot of dwellings and the home of most Yoruba and several other cultures outside the state as a result of cultural diffussion resulting from inter-group settlements as well as because of the diverse commercial and industrial activities that bring together in coastal Lagos State in particular, people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

**Geographical Influences on Art**

(Awofisayo, 2003) in a book entitled "*The Evolution and Development of Lagos State"* looked in to the physical and cultural transformation of Lagos and its environment, highlighting the visible connections between the geographical landscape and the arts. Interestingly, the study by Awofisayo is also a chronological note in the physical development of the coastal Yoruba region and Lagos as unaguably one of the most advanced cities in Nigeria.

Akindele (2003) discusses the influence of Benin Kingdom to the East of coastal Yoruba land especially in the tradition of the *Eko* people the original inhabitants and land owners. Some of such influences are the bladed sword used as the symbol of obaship. *Ogalade* society that uses the "Abebe'' or fan while the war captains or Abagbon identify themselves with the top hat or "*keremesi"*. The insignia for office of the four classes of chiefs indicates different sources: the sword suggests a Benin connection; the horse tail an Oyo/Ife connection; the fan a Yoruba/Benin or further eastern connection, while the top hat must have been the influence of a Nupe or further northern connection and more importantly of the Portuguese. Akeusola" (2003) critical analysis of south-western Nigeria sheds some light on how ancient people lived in the past. The study posits that the themes, symbols, supporting myths, design motifs, signs and patterns found in traditional story-telling and folktales or "Alo apagbe and poetry such as *Ifa* verse, *Oriki*, *Orile*, *Ekun Iyawo*, and *Ijala* can be seen in *Egun Alare, Isipa Ode*, and some other African traditional displays. Olabitan's view of the coastal Yoruba of Lagos (as cited in Akeusola 2003) support the researcher's analysis on that despite its cultural and economic importance in Yoruba society and Nigeria there has been few studies on coastal Yoruba.

(Okùnadé, 2011) in his submission observes that karajagba music of the *Idejo* chiefs and *Igbe* royal music of the kings, princes and princesses of Lagos were more prominent among the Awori and Ijebu people. He also observes that *Igbe* music as performed today makes use of a simple rhythmic structure, accompanied by a six stroke bell accompaniment. Okunade further adds that the Awori culture, one of the most populous sub-groups of the coastal Yoruba are influenced by some cultural values of Benin such as the use of royal *gbedu* drums which were presented to

Asipa by the legendary founder of Lagos monarchy and its first Oba in the sixteen century by *Oba* of Benin in acknowledging his military prowess (Ajetunmobi, 2003) . Today the *gbedu* drums are only found among the traditional musical orchestral of the coastal region and used for installations and other significant events by the *Oba* and chiefs of Lagos at *Iwuye* (coronation) ceremonies, they and Benin cultuturally than with other Yoruba sub-groups. This is evident in how the coastal Yoruba, especially the Awori who is said to have fought the Benin expansionist move to Lagos and Asipa's clan who helped the Benin people by returning the body of their dead prince interpret signs and patterns like white cap, bladed swords, beads, staff.

According to (Ajayi, 2003), the historical eviodence of how coastal culture, language and arts developed can be seen in their linguistic structure, musicology, anthropology, architecture, festival and oral traditions. He also notes the great influence of slave returnees on the region's arts. An example of this is how the patterns and signs imprinted on the totems of *Awori* and *Ikorodu* and "*Oriki"* embody different historical and artistic reconstructions of the socio-political and economic history of the coastal and other Lagosians. (Makinde, 2004) discusses the polythestic religion of the Yoruba people and its influences on their arts and culture. He argues that the Yoruba people worship different deities such as *Obatala, Oduduwa, Moremi, Oluorogbo, Orisa-Ikire, Ailala, Sango, Osun,Yemoja, Egigun, Oro, Oke Badan, Gelede, Eyo, Agemo, Orisa-Oko* etc. In order to create the arts and images, music, dance and special attires used in the worship of these deities, artists have over the years learnt how to create different designs from motifs, signs and patterns. The study extends beyond mere descriptive survey, asserting that the Yoruba people have creatively mastered the artistic display of skills in dress making such as *agbada, sapara*, dansiki, derived from *agbada* and the trouzers or *sokoto* called *sooro*, *bagi* and *kembe*. According to (Euba, 1975) cited in (Mobolanle, 2005) Yoruba traditional practice, poetry and music are synonymous and are a powerful influence on what artists, paint and draw, design and sculpt.. She suggests that music, song, chant, poetry and talking drum and the desire to render them as artistic as possible while capturing the essence of the deity or festival of which they are a part has an effect on how artists work with materials, on how they interpret and use design motifs and patterns as well as on the choices they make regarding images, colour, patterns and materials with the visual artists and process by which societies undergo fundamental changes.

Another example of contemporary artist, this time from Nigeria, is Yinka Shonibare who is best known for his paint and fabric infussion which the labelled "*Double Dutch"* . This painting examines and at the same time explores the issue of identity in contemporary art practice. Shonibare's concept evolving the concept of *Double-Dutch* fabric art that uses various dizzing effects to depict several iconic 18$^{th}$ century paintings, such as Thomas Gainsborough's Mr and Mrs Andrew, and Henry Raeburn's, Reverend Robert Walker on Duddingston Loch, to mention just a few. As Rachel Cook notes in her report that Shonibare's work somehow, infuses or reflects a deep sense of his ambivalent nature in the

creation of his instalation works such as his series of photographic postures called Diary of a Victorian Dandy (1998) in which Shonibare featured as the frock coat-wearing hero, playing billiards, lying abed. Shonibare claimed that- the work is reminiscent of the era of complete domination (by colonialism) and repression (of Africans). See article originally published in *Guardian* of 2010 *Art* and *Design* Shonibare fourth-plinth. The attempt to give a certain identity to work of art in Nigeria whose history is not too distant from our time is instructive on relationship between arts and history. These segmentations that have been identified so far tie up Nigeria's art history, to the life experience of its people as documented in the artworks. That history has a macrocosmic atribute as far as Nigeria is concerned. That macrocosmic value then relates to Nigeria as an entity topologically.

"But beyond the topological or geographical signification of arts relation to history is also an artworks personal history or the life experience of the artist. The artist's history and intuitionism becomes a particular experience that shapes his perception and the forms he creates'' (Ugiomoh F. O., 2004). An identity is said to emerge when there is a general relationship in motive, ideology or the nature of artistic form generated. This becomes a period identity. This identity as coucault instructs, is a product of cultural limits or "the epistemic figurative basis'' of a culture and its historical progression (Ugiomoh, 2004).

## Conclusion

This paper explores the potentials of the painting-art forms of coastal Yoruba of south-western Nigeria. The research has demonstrated, identified and investigated the aesthetics of the crafts, arts and motifs found in and around the coastal Yoruba areas; examining each community with regards to their art forms. The medium being defined is paintings and drawings work. As the researcher have described in this paper evolved through three distinct phases, and the current phase, of 'transformation", seems to evolve the re-creation of the coastal Yoruba oral art and words respectively. Through several series of artistic practice investigation carried out in the studio, other forms are emerging, to justify the reason for this study at large. This underlying structure closely imitates the art practice of everyday life of the coastal Yoruba societies. That is, the strength of art forms relies on a sense of liveliness, not in the nous that the paintings or images are literally alive, but in the deeper sense that the activity of works produced itself proceeds in this study.

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