

# The Use of 'Readymade Food Vessels' in Exploration of Metaphorical Sculptures that portray Hunger in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study discusses readymade food vessels materials in the creation of metaphorical sculptures. The sculptures were explored using art based research methodology that involves theory and practice. It resulted in the creation of eighteen metaphorical sculptures of which five are discussed in this paper. The sculptures explored as metaphorical sculpture forms interrogate hunger phenomenon in Nigeria using discarded readymade food vessels materials that are found in the environment. The study contests that rejection of forms in sculpture by conceptual artists should be considered, it is because of this that metaphorical sculptures created emphasise idea and form. It also contest that art should not be created for perception only. The study in exploring 'readymade food vessels' to create metaphorical sculptures holds that idea and form have to be present as visual thinking in order to give new insight to the viewer about hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. The paper concludes that using readymade food vessels materials goes beyond everyday function they create sculptures that give new insight to knowledge of hunger phenomenon in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** 'Readymade food vessels', exploration, metaphorical sculpture, idea, form, hunger

## 1. Introduction

Duchamp explored the notion that idea constitutes art and that meaning is not in the inner structure of art object, but is constructed outside it. To achieve this he associated readymade object used in everyday life, to art, by displaying a urinary, as art, in an exhibition. Cole and McIntyre in Knowles and Cole (2008) explain that Marcel Duchamp is often considered to be the first artist to use every day discarded found object to create works of art, which he demonstrated with his 1917 work Readymade. In art practice, readymade art is a term which Marcel Duchamp used to designate his works. It is the demonstration of an idea that, artistic creation should not depend on established rule and craft (Getlein, 2002; Janson and Janson 2006). Since Duchamp explored the readymade, sculpture has gone beyond creation of physical objects meant only for aesthetic appreciation to embody intellect. Thus, McEvilley (1999) states that:

Since Duchamp, anything can be rendered as sculpture, by designating it as such, and in the post-modern perspective, a sculpture is just a 'thing'; it doesn't even need material or solidity but can be immaterial 'thing'; Yet sculpture for the last generation or two has been dominated by the readymade more than other models or influences put together.

The creative exploration of readymade, in any form and medium, formerly not regarded in modernism, is considered as sculpture in postmodernism. Duchamp, Dada movement and some artists that adapted the conceptual idea of readymade created art ideas that transformed visual art practice which deemphasised form or aesthetic qualities in art. Baudrillard (2008) explains that Duchamp's introduction of the readymade which Baudrillard considered the banality of art merged with the banality of real world. He maintained that it was as a result of it that all reality has been thrust into aesthetic realm, as democratisation of arts, which made it possible for everything to be regarded and defined as art. He further opined that this democracy, embodies the fact that every object, without distinction would be called art.

Thus, Baudrillard (2008) opinion that Duchamp's idea resulted in the emergence of human activity that democratised and link art to thought and aesthetic, needs a concept that can define the coming together of idea and form. Lane in Inglis Hughson (2005) states that "Duchamp's 'ready-mades' were born at the intersection between his highly developed artistic habitus and field of artistic production which had already undergone a long history of gradual auto nomination..." Duchamp created meaning from his ready-mades to provoke thought in the viewer. Duchamp held the idea that art exist only because the artists declared that it exists he used the readymade to illustrate the idea. Similarly this study uses Duchamp's idea and the other philosophies that constitute this study to question the separation that Duchamp and the Conceptualist created between idea constituted art and aesthetics which caused the removal of form from conceptual art. Building from the idea this study in the exploration of metaphorical forms in sculpture using readymade do not emphasise the issue of aesthetics as irrelevant to the study. It is because of this that this study explores metaphorical sculptures to question hunger phenomenon in Nigeria with the aim of integrating idea in visual form using 'readymade food vessels materials. Barthes in Ottman (2002) supports this approach where he suggests that a critical examination of an objects materiality is a theoretical act. The study in exploring metaphorical sculpture, considers their materiality with 'readymade food vessels', in order to bring the metaphors that discuss hunger phenomenon in

Nigeria to visible form.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century plastic, one of the materials used for domestic and commercial purposes, was widely used in the packaging and distribution of goods. Heather (2014) opines that plastic was originally invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to replace ivory, rubber and shellac in order to free manufacturers from limitations of nature. Today some artists use recycled plastic and other packages that was first used by the Pop artists to create visual art. Janson and Janson (2006) affirmed by Getlein (2002) states that Pop art began in London, in mid-1950 by the independent groups and intellectuals. They viewed commercial culture, such as packaging, home appliances, and other commodities, as visual materials in the mundane, mass-produced objects and images of America's popular culture.

In Nigeria discarded plastic 'readymade food vessels' appear in the form of plates, bottles, containers and spoon. They are used for domestic and public functions some of the readymade food vessels made in paper, plastic, and aluminium, litter Nigerian environment, as discarded items, in private and public cabbage bins. The discarded readymade food vessels are spectacles that call for aesthetic and conceptual attentions, in addition to ecological and archaeological attention.

The study in order to explore metaphorical sculptures using readymade food vessels builds on the philosophical ideas derived from some philosophers. The philosophical idea of Langer (1979) was used to explore the first hints of complex ideas that were presented in the artist's researcher's mind as series of images, and different thoughts that tried to present themselves for considerations in the processes of this study. Langer (1979) explains that philosophy of art should, start in the studio, not in the gallery, auditorium and library. Thus, issues of art should be explored and discussed by the artists that create meaning from subjective experience. In this study the exploration of metaphorical sculpture forms that, discuss hunger phenomenon in Nigeria involves questions, problems and challenges that are identified within studio practice which are linked to philosophy.

Although this study on exploration of 'readymade food vessels' into metaphorical sculpture may appear simple it is a complex art process that was conducted in sequence. Thus exploration of verbal metaphor with readymade food vessels was transferred, into metaphorical forms in sculpture that creates meaning in line with the philosophies of Arnheim's (1997) visual thinking that sees idea and sight as having the same import in meaning making. It raised conflicting questions in the study such as; is there another way of thinking about hunger besides verbal metaphor. What are the limits in using 'readymade made food vessels' in bringing intellectual 'idea' and physical 'sense' in exploration of metaphorical sculptures that discuss hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. It was seen in the view of Langer (1979) that inward hearing is a work of the mind, it begins with conception of form and ends with their complete presentation in imagined experience that thought is grasped in order to be understood. The study drawing inference from Langer's 'inward hearing' of the mind anticipates that readymade can create metaphorical sculptures that are visual or material thinking. Instead of appropriating manufactured industrial object as art, the study consciously explores 'readymade food vessels' to create metaphorical sculptures, which convey thought in another way.

Simple as it may appear in this study 'readymade food vessels' may not create meaning in a vacuum, if removed from the context of its every day function. It is because of this that it needs to find a new function that its material form can be explored in order to create new meaning. Thus, the use of readymade to explore the creation of metaphorical sculptures lays in the view of de Duve in Sigmon (2009) that states four conditions to explore readymade. He explained them thus; an object, an author, a public and institution as the criteria for readymade to be considered as art. He insists that the absence of this four qualities, in readymade makes the work not to be a work of art.

It is in the light of this that, this study uses 'readymade food vessels' materials to explore metaphorical sculptures that are not dependent on idea or sight only to discuss hunger phenomenon in Nigeria.

## **2. Readymade Food Vessels in exploration of verbal metaphors**

The aim of this study is to create metaphorical forms in sculpture, through an exploration with 'readymade food vessels' materials. For this reason the discussion is based on the five works that are created using the materials to understand the hunger phenomenon in another perspective that gives insight to new knowledge. The metaphorical sculptures discussed are; crude burden, economic meltdown, brain drain, and water borehole.

### **2.1 Crude Burden**

In this study the first metaphor that is explored using 'readymade food vessels' is "*Crude Burden*", it is explored in order to make meaning of hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. The expectation is that exploration of the metaphor will give insight of the hunger phenomenon in visual form rather than in language meaning. It is grounded in the artist researcher's imaginative thought. To achieve the exploration of the metaphor '*Crude Burden*' the artist researcher uses 'readymade food vessels' such as; plates, oil and water containers, table water containers and flask found in the environment as multimedia in making meaning of events of hunger phenomenon. It entails an association of the metaphor crude burden with 'readymade food vessels' materials. The approach agrees with

Duchamp's idea. Adams (2007) states that Duchamp's idea is that art should be meant to address the intellect. The study also explores beyond Duchamp's idea to create form of the metaphor '*Crude Burden*' in order to present it to perception. The approach agrees with Efland in Constantino (2007) that imaginative cognition is the power of forming mental images of what is not present to the senses or that has not been experienced before. Plate I, '*Crude Burden*' is narrative, visual composite, metaphorical sculpture that appears as flat relief sculpture that can be viewed frontally at a glance.



*Plate I, Crude Burden, Artist Eze Ngene, plastic plates, oil and water containers, table water and flask, 384cm x 162cm, 2013.*

'*Crude Burden*' has three segments that constitute it as a narrative, visual composite metaphorical sculpture. In content the first segment that has empty plates are metaphors for lost dreams, lost opportunities, and the lost expectations of something from crude oil resources. This come to bear if one observes that the empty plates seem to be waiting with the passing of time to be occupied or filled with tangible items. In furtherance the empty food vessels are metaphor of inequity in the distribution of Nigerian national wealth. The empty containers also portray the huge Nigerian national wealth that have been hidden and diverted by some of her citizens for personal use. It is therefore metaphor of corruption and its effect on Nigeria this study sees as crude burden.

The second segment with its assembled plastic containers present the revenue that accrues from crude oil resources. What influenced the exploration of this segment is that everything in Nigeria including development is interconnected with crude oil generation and revenue. This segment that, is the visual metaphor of crude oil, questions why there should be hunger phenomenon, since the sharing of the crude oil revenue, for national development has not stopped. The third segment, because of its glass like, is a visual metaphorical sculpture that, presents the embodied subjective desire, of Nigerians for opulence that, have been lost because of corruption and miss management of crude oil revenue. The work has become a metaphorical sculpture that, its aesthetic perception and linear flow, of appreciation is interrupted by viewer's intellect, in trying to remember, or understand hunger phenomenon. The metaphorical sculpture '*Crude Burden*' therefore becomes, a visual information and data enhancement of the verbal metaphor. It modifies the intellect and perception, of the hunger phenomenon. The work revolves within everyday real experience, of hunger in Nigerian context. The study builds on Bourriaud (2002) that the role of art, is no longer creating utopian realities, but should be a way of living within existing real, presents the actual event of hunger in Nigeria, is everyday over dependence on crude oil. '*Crude Burden*' brings to focus the consideration of the, use of verbal metaphor and value of 'readymade food vessels' materials, to portray hunger phenomenon within the context of sculpture practice.

## **2.2 Economic Meltdown**

The study responds to explore the metaphor economic meltdown with 'readymade food vessels' such as plates and buckets to create metaphorical sculpture installation. To achieve this concept, the idea is that knowing comes from studio exploration and that, thinking in material, is to think differently about the verbal metaphor, in a non-discursive form. Thus formless verbal metaphor economic meltdown is decontextualized, into sculpture installation, using 'readymade food vessels' materials, which are joined together in different ways which present the hunger phenomenon. The emergent metaphorical sculpture installation created, present materiality or visual thinking of hunger phenomenon. The work creates meaning of the verbal metaphor, by moving away from word



structure and becoming possible sculpture installation in readymade food vessels materials. For the purpose of this study, Plate II 'Economic Meltdown' that is among the series of works explored is discussed.



**Plate II, Economic Meltdown, Artist Eze Ngene, plastic plates, and buckets. 61 cm x 60cm x 92cm, 2014.**

The work represents the experiences of the crashing down, of world economies because of devaluation of the value, of the European currency, in the world financial market. In the context of Nigeria the work depicts the political, economic, social interest as it affects Nigeria. It has become the new metaphorical sculpture that, narrates hunger phenomenon with 'readymade food vessels' materials. In analysis, application and synthesis, the form, content, context and materiality of the work therefore create, higher other level of understanding about the devaluation, of the Euro and its effect on Nigeria. The metaphorical sculpture has become visual cognition that, provides accessibility of information, that the viewer can internalize the 'Economic Meltdown', in relation to hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. For instance the green plates on top of the sculpture installation, represent some powerful nations such as; the European nations, Asian tigers, and Arab world that, their influences determine the financial activities in the world financial market. The bucket that suspends them portrays, their volume of economic power, connections and the affluence that they wield to determine how businesses are transacted, in the world international market. The burnt holes and materials that, composed the work, portray the hardship as it affects Nigeria and her thirty six states at the time. The plates at the foreground depict the frustrations, agony, damages and experiences which Nigeria with her thirty six states incurred. The work embodies idea, sight and pattern forming that, are cognate and affective or visual thinking that depicts the economic meltdown. In extension the work builds on Gombrich (1971) transference and free association of cultural values, as visual metaphor of art and value. Although that, the researcher uses Langer's theory, to construct the theory of this study, the researcher disagrees with Langer (1979) in placing form before the viewer's sight only. The artist researcher tries to prove that, the metaphorical sculpture 'Economic Meltdown' created, in this study are beyond mere aesthetic perception. The work has become visual thinking that, dialogue between idea, form and materiality. This artist researcher illustrates, the interplay between acts of making with readymade food vessels by integrating formless verbal metaphor into taking physical form as sculpture installation that, can be discussed by the viewer.

Thus, the metaphorical sculpture installation 'Economic Meltdown' has commingled with the senses and intellect. The study agrees with the idea of Duchamp that everyday object and experiences constitute reality in art. Thinking, in visual form using 'readymade food vessels' materials, provide possibilities that created the metaphorical sculpture installation 'Economic Meltdown'.

### **2.3 Brain Drain**

The third sculpture created is an alternative sculpture installation that is derived from hunger phenomenon. It is explored in response to investigate hunger phenomenon, in another perspective. The materials that are used are buckets, plate and food container. The reason for using the materials is that they are used as containers for containing or draining liquid, their fluidity can be linked to the metaphor brain drain that is used in this study. On the premise that the metaphor brain drain can embody mind and sight, the study conceptualise and connect metaphor brain drain to objects, events and actions in sculpture installation. The emergent metaphorical sculpture installation, unfold into alternative ways, of thinking that involve the intellect and perception. To achieve the idea the metaphorical sculpture installation created, does not represent hunger phenomenon in realism. The work becomes metaphor of absence. The metaphorical sculpture installation, becomes alternative or iterative ways that, expand the perspective that the concept, of brain drain is perceived and understood. The work crystalizes into an understanding of the metaphor as visual metaphor of loss, lack, search and migration resulting due to hunger phenomenon. The artist researcher explores metaphorical sculpture installation based on intuition and imagination. This agrees with Knowles and Cole (2008) that art in research approaches are proliferating metaphors that, take different positions at dizzying rate. In furtherance they hold that, intuition and imagination add to suggest, the metaphor that, may help provide the conceptual and art structures for each inquiries. The artist researcher contextualises the verbal metaphor brain drain that, discuss hunger phenomenon in Nigeria into a visual form, in order to open possibilities, that are beyond comprehending hunger, as mere language expression. On this premise the metaphorical sculpture installation created, can provide meaning, which parallels in different ways, with verbal metaphor brain drain to reflect the effect of hunger phenomenon on Nigerian intellectuals. The metaphorical sculpture installation becomes, sources of information that, gives insight to the phenomenon, in a context that brain drain is compared to other situations, outside what it used to be known. Plate, III *Brain Drain* illustrates, the creation of alternative sculpture form, derived from hunger phenomenon based on the mentioned effects of the phenomenon.

The work portrays the migration of Nigerian intellectuals, to Europe and Asia in the early 1980's and 1990s, because of introduction of the economic austerity measures by the Nigerian military government. The metaphorical installation 'Brain Drain' reflects the hardship and emotional state of life during and after the introduction of economic austerity measures in Nigeria during the mid1980s and 1990s till date. The plastic water buckets, plate and food container in their assembled position depict draining of liquid content it is the metaphor of the brain drain in Nigeria at the periods when there was forced migration of the intellectuals by the introduction of the economic austerity measure. The various holes on the surface of the work present the drain and the unbearable condition at that time which forced the intellectuals to migrate out of the country. The various props or growths on the surfaces of the work portray the canker worms of 'corruption' in Nigeria that devastated her economy causing poverty and hunger. The study presents insight to the different experiences of metaphor brain drain that it associates to hunger phenomenon in another perspective. It agrees with Arnold and Iversen (2003) that "art will thus at times, become a metaphor for subjective-object relation-the structure of signs and meaning, within a work of art playing out these instabilities and contradictions". In this instance a representation of verbal metaphor brain drain that is used to discuss migration of Nigerian intellectuals abroad provides object-subject interaction in sculpture installation.



*Plate III, Brain Drain, Artist Eze Ngene, plastic buckets, plate, and food coolant, 129cm x 58cm, 2014.*

#### **2.4 Table Water**

'Table Water' 1 plate IV and Table Water 2 plate V are also composite sculptures, that are explored. They are constituted with different 'readymade food vessels' that give the works, the form, content and context that is being discussed. Plate, IV, has a form that looks like a Decanter for serving water. It portrays what Nigerian citizens regard as their clean water which is not equitably distributed as it is only the privileged ones that can offered the clean water. The inequitable distribution of water is portrayed by the ways that the bottles are composed with some higher and bigger than the bottles. The cups which are of equal sizes are arranged in serial horizontal and vertical form on top of the small bottles. The idea is to depict the majority of Nigerian citizens that can't have access to clean water for drinking.

Plate, IV is depicted as a table, set for serving food to guests, in content and context it creates meaning, based on human experience within Nigerian context. The work like 'Table Water' 1 plate IV provides opportunities for contemplations on the inequality in the provision of clean water in Nigeria. In this way, the sculpture installations show that, it is possible to create new knowledge of water borehole which reveals the difficulty of obtaining clean water in Nigeria. The installations are achieved from the concept of water and the readymade food vessels that inspired their explorations.

*Plate IV: Table Water1, Artist, Eze Ngene, water bottles, cups, 170 x 42 x 192cm, 2014*



*Plate IV: Table Water I, Artist, Eze Ngene, water bottles, cups, 170 x 42 x 192cm, 2014*



*Plate V: Table Water 2, Artist Eze Ngene, water bottles, cups, water containers, sieve, 156 x 42 x 85 cm, 2014*

The works move beyond the readymade food vessels and become representations of hunger phenomenon, that have physical presence, which the viewer can interact with, and thereby, make better and informed meaning of



hunger phenomenon, in a new context.

### 3. Conclusion

Readymade art first started with Marcel Duchamp who demonstrated that art should not depend on established principles and conventions to construct knowledge. It was because of it that he coined the term readymade to designate his works. In this study Duchamp's idea and other philosophies guided the exploration of metaphorical sculptures explored with readymade 'food vessels'. The metaphorical sculptures created using readymade material found in the environment investigated hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. Five metaphorical sculptures created were derived from the verbal metaphors that discuss hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. Crude burden, Economic meltdown, Brain drain, and Water borehole, are the verbal metaphors explored in another perspective in order to give insight to issues of hunger phenomenon in Nigeria.

The exploration of the verbal metaphors using 'readymade food vessels' has become metaphorical sculptures discussed in this study. '*Crude Burden*' is a metaphor that is used to discuss the effect of the crude oil on the economic development of Nigeria. The metaphor was explored beyond word structure using readymade food vessels as multimedia that transformed from its regular everyday function of containment to become metaphorical sculpture. As a visual composite metaphor its form, content and context reflects the event of hunger phenomenon in Nigeria is the over dependence on crude oil. The insight is depicted by the empty materials which illustrate absence of opulence and social amenities that should have been provided by the revenues realised from the crude oil.

'*Economic Meltdown*' was derived the metaphor economic meltdown which was used to describe the financial crises in the World market that caused the Euro to come down. The metaphor was explored in three dimensional emergent sculpture presents the effect of the financial crises in Nigeria. The hardship is presented with the burnt holes and damaged materials that some of them are used for the distribution of commodities in Nigeria. '*Brain Drain*' is one other work that was created from 'readymade food vessels' which reveals the effect of hunger in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, because of the introduction of austerity measures by the Nigerian military Government. The work portrays the forced migration embarked upon the some Nigerian academicians to abroad in order to survive. *Table water 1 and 2* are explored to present the inequality in obtaining clean water to drink in Nigeria as only the rich ones can afford it the rest of the citizens are exposed to impure water.

In conclusion metaphorical sculptures created using 'readymade food vessels' succeed to create new knowledge of hunger phenomenon in another perspective using 'readymade food vessels' materials. In the exploration of 'readymade food vessels', the materials transformed the metaphors into material thinking or visual thinking that meaning can be made about hunger phenomenon in Nigeria. In other words the materiality of the 'readymade food vessels' in exploration of sculptures reveals the hidden meaning of the metaphors in visual form. The sculptures therefore create their metaphorical meanings in non-discursive forms.

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