

In Search of Virtuosity through the Manipulation of the Textiles Screen Printing Method: A Report

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Abstract

A print maker can impart their unmistakable trademark style through the dexterous manipulation of the silk screen, the squeegee and the inks available to them. Such finished products become the known style of the exponent, and could win recognition and acclaim. Styles are achieved from a cultural continuum, and whatever choices a designer or artist or print maker practices are somehow derived from what already exists. These and become an extension of the cultural resources of that society. This paper reports on Ashiedu Ogboli's interaction with the screen print method within the limitation of materials and equipment in the studio in Maiduguri, Borno State Nigeria. What can be achieved and how they are achieved are sometimes seen as departures from "mainstream" techniques or methods. The influences of the immediate environment and its realities are explored. This paper documents some designs that were executed, and how they were handled from the beginning to the end in a rather under-resourced studio in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Dexterity; Serigraphy; Virtuosity; Improvisation; African Rhythm

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have had the propensity to register their impressions on their own selves, the objects they had made, their pets, dwelling places and indeed any other surface that caught their fancy. Such registration often required the use of simple palm and finger prints, or even foot prints. Sometimes, early people used natural colours such as ochres, sea shells, vegetable and animal fluids to decorate things, by forcing them through meshes, sieves or stencils.

Stencilling has existed as a printing method for thousands of years. Evidence of the silk screen methods (also known as serigraphy) exist for atleast two thousand years in Middle East and Asia.

Serigraphy provides the ability to register a single impression from a design or image, or a number of repeats, or perhaps an infinite number of repeats and even a variety of repeat modes. Sometimes, the serigraphic print is used to embellish wearable apparel, while at other times, it may be used to decorate homes, or public halls, ceilings, or pillars or floors.

There is a evidence of the use of serigraphy in pre-colonial West Africa among several West African cultures, including voltaic peoples, Madinka, Igbo, Yoruba, Nupe and Mende (Bollard and Gilfoy, 1988). Serigraphy subsumes the name for screen printing technique and encompasses other screen printing methods that are not necessarily executed on or with the silk screen.

A print maker's virtuosity is judged by how they manipulate and successfully deploy the material and method available to them. A print maker may for example find that they have to work within a restricted colour scheme, because of the non-availability of a wide range of colours. It may also be that some basic equipment like proper squeegee, a flat printing surface, or the non-availability of photosensitive materials such as potassium dichromate, among others. Additionally the designer might resort to the use of kerosene and common laundry bleach, and expose a coated screen to direct sunlight in the absence of a proper darkroom or digital colour separation facilities.

Therefore such a designer is required to have a wide range of competencies and skills in order to function. This paper discusses several of these issues and makes a report on how they were handled.

Aims and Objectives

This paper describes how a screen can be made from either a single draft design or a set of drafts; that are exposed to light using photosensitive materials that are easy to obtain, and of a modest cost of about twenty US dollars (December 2017, Nigeria).

Thereafter we explore simple registration formats, and how the formats can be taken further in search of virtuosity.

It is possible to obtain an intricate design by manipulating a simple screen creatively; in the same manner that a cinematographer might manipulate light, images and speeds to create visual spectacles in cinematic arts.

Such end results obtained from the screen printed fabric could be used for several functions to enhance livelihood.

Materials and Methods

The following materials and equipment are used in order to obtain the results that are presented:

- i. Silk screen meshes
- ii. Print frames (made of wood)
- iii. Exposure chemicals which are: Sensitizers, potassium dichromate kerosene, vegetable oil, laundry bleach
- iv. Squeegee, cutters, brushes, aerosol, spraying devices, thumb tacks
- v. Screen printing inks
- vi. Ink binders
- vii. Water Wood varnish (used as a fixative)



Fig. 1: Basic Screen printing tools. Spoon for scooping; An improvised slipper squeegee; Brushes for creating effects; Cutter.

The Art of Screen Manipulation

An essential characteristic of a silk screen is to enable the registration of the design encoded on it through a suitable method.

Having registered the design, further consideration which as the clarity and fidelity of the registered work are taken into account. In the same manner, aesthetic judgements may be made thereafter.

Step-by-step (with explanation and illustration)



Fig 2: Screen printed fabric using simulated popular Adire Eleko Motifs. Black printing ink on white khaki. 100/100 cm. 2018.

Step 2

Print ink manipulation in single column:



Fig 3: Screen printed fabric using simulated popular Adire Eleko motifs white printing ink overlaid on black splash on khaki. 100/100 cm. 2018.

Step 3

The following prints have either been impressed at least twice with the same screen with slight displacement in order to achieve misprint or had undercoating applied to the ground.



Fig. 4: Single screen overlaid misprint on khaki. 100/100 cm. 2018.



Fig. 5: Single screen overlaid misprint on khaki No. 2. 100/100 cm. 2018.

Step 4 Final Outcome

These outcomes are efforts by the screen artist's in search of virtuosity:



Fig. 6: Carnage I. Single screen print with multiple super-imposition of colours. Orange and black scheme in landscape orientation. 60cm/70cm. 2017.



Fig. 7: Carnage II. Single screen print with multiple super-imposition of colours. Orange and blue scheme in landscape orientation. 60cm/85cm. 2017.



Fig. 8: Harmattan. Single screen print with colour overlay in orange scheme. 1m/1.2m. 2017.

End Use

Screen printed items can be used in several ways, among which are (i) As dress fabric; (ii) As wall hangings on decoration; (iii) As surface design for any object, or even as body art or embellishment for any other material that may find human fancy. Furthermore, there is room to study whether it can have application for 3-dimensional printing or cutting edge application in modern technology and mass production. In the case of the prints made for this study, they can be used for dress or furnishing fabric, or wall decoration. Because they are abstract and have asymmetrical orientation, they can be displayed upside down, right side up, sideways, or indeed in any orientation that finds the fancy of whomsoever decides. This apparent versatility could further promote and enhance their uses, value and relevance; since they can serve eclectic uses or be made into mass produced items.

Conclusion

The end result presented in this report show that dexterous handling of the sieve screen, the column and the squeegee can go along way in enhancing or improving the outcome of a design, especially if and when there are

shortfalls in materials or essential equipment for the work.

Improvisation and innovation can makeup, disguise or overcome design or registration inadequacies. Moreover, this style is in agreement with the essential and crucial philosophy of sub-Sahara Africa art, which learn heavily, or at least tends to favour or prefer asymmetrical arrangements, composition and representations in keeping with the African rhythm.

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