

AN ADAPTATION OF PERFORMANCE USING SWANGE MUSIC TO CREATE CONCEPTUAL PAINTINGS THROUGH DANCE STEPS

By
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Abstract

The aesthetics of Swange brought to the fore the importance of the angeer fabric, the musical instruments and movement as important traits of the Tiv and African culture. In addition, the overview also brings to the fore the importance of music and dance as possible media through which paintings can be realised, and finally sees dance and music in African life and concluded that they were important organs in the regions of Africa and could be used as a vehicle in the production of paintings.

Introduction

Rosenberg's redefinition of art as 'an act' rather than 'an object', as 'a process' rather than 'a product', was influential, and laid the foundation for a number of major art movements, from Happening and Fluxus to Conceptual Art, Performance art, Installation Art, and Earth Art. According to Validiver, a philosopher, in Anidugbe (2003), "all study reveals a personal vacuum, which knowledge alone can fill". Today, conceptual art expressions have opened a new vacuum of ways for unlimited opportunity in creativity. Ferrier and Pichon (2002) report that, "Art becomes spectacle, thanks to a young man from Nice, Yves Klein, known up to now for his monochrome pictures. This time, instead of painting his pictures, Klein has used naked women, coated with colour, as brushes during a memorable evening attended by guests in formal attire". This has encouraged other means of expressions notably action painting, splashing/sprinkling, performance painting and many other forms of conceptual art. Rosenberg (2011), observes that in today's art expressions, "the painter no longer approach his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him". Whether it is figuratively finished or otherwise the end result would be the result of this conceptual art encounter.

Buhari (2003) in "Dear Uche" has observed that "on our artists' shore, a new cargo has arrived not really so new, though it is called conceptual art". This form of art according to him is an "Art that is not confined to space, medium or time. It is not physically bound". He laments that this form of art is an "art of spirit". Perhaps his description of conceptual art further triggered this research which was considered conceptual from inception. Carroll in Clive (2002) and the Formalist Theory, states that, "modern artists eschewed pictorial illustration, composing paintings out of often nonrepresentational shapes and masses of colour. Their aim was not to capture the perceptual appearances of the world, but often to make

images noteworthy for their visual organization, form, and arresting design". Sale and Betti (2004), are of the same opinion that "conceptual artists are both artists that employ quirky materials and innovative methods". This may be in the form of an adaptation of dance to perform painting expressions.

Performance in Painting

In defining performance, Drew's (2010), states that,

To define the term performance, I mean an act that is "interactional in nature and involving symbolic forms and live bodies" (Stern and Henderson 3). It is an act that involves the interactions between a performer and a text, and an audience and a performer. The symbolism occurs at the "intersection between text and context." This is where and how the page is brought to life on the stage through the performed gestures and actions.

Drew shows how the performer and performance interact with each other. In this review of performance in painting, it has been shown how paintings are executed in the course of performance. This means therefore, works reviewed are works that were produced in front of an audience. It could be through musical performances or such occasions where people are watching. Works produced show the interaction of the performer, the colours, the canvas and the audience. According to Drew, some groups of studies focus on performances that include paintings. Several dissertations treat performances that include paintings.

Ellen Zweig discusses the happenings of the seventies that were intermediate events combining music and painting in a performance. Similarly, Luiz Galizia deals with the theatre developed by Robert Wilson, who combined music, painting and architecture in performance. Jon Kay, relating this rise of performance art to the plastic arts of painting, sculpture and architecture, states that artists realized they could explore the other arts through performance in ways that allowed them to mix media. Catherine Schieve's dissertation puts these ideas into practice, composing a musical score with paint.

He concludes that such works "are not only works to be heard, but to be seen". Perhaps Drew implied the end result produced under conducive and performative conditions.

Cultural Dances in Nigeria

Nigeria is a vast multi-cultural nation with more than three hundred ethnic groups that cut across the country. It is also the most populated African nation in the world; it was said to have a population of about one hundred and seventy million (170,000,000) people. According to Abimbola (2010), “with over 300 different ethnic groups and languages, Nigeria is one of the richest nations in the world as far as culture is concerned. Each ethnic group has its own language, its own dance, music and musical instruments and its own religion and tradition”. While stressing his point Abimbola further states that, “The most important potential of Nigeria's culture which can be developed for purposes of tourism is the rich and diverse culture of Nigeria's peoples.” He adds that,

Nigeria is one of the richest countries in the world when we speak of cultural dances, music, musical instruments and chants. A few examples will suffice. The Ekpe dance of the Efik and Ibibio, the Atilogwu dance of the Igbo which are already well known and the Swange dance of the Tiv in Benue State are few examples of what we can easily exhibit for visitors to enjoy.

Benue State and its Swange Dances

In Nigeria, among the Tiv ethnic group, there is the Swange dance which is the focus of this paper. Swange dance of the Tiv from Benue State has been and remains one of the most popular cultural dances in Nigeria. Benue State where Swange emanates is blessed in agriculture and tourism among others. There are many cultural dances in Benue State; most of them are performed by the Tiv.



Map of Benue State in Red Colour,
Source: Official Website: <http://www.greaterbenue.com>
http://www.nigeriagallery.com/Nigeria/States_Nigeria/Benue_State.html
Accessed on 10/1/2011 at 4:42 pm.

Benue State website publication (2011) states that,

The State Tourism possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage which finds expression in colourful cloths, exotic masquerades, sophisticated music and dances. Traditional dances from Benue have won acclaim at national and international cultural festivals. These

dances include Ingyough, Ange, Anchanakupa and Swange among the Tiv and Anuwowowo and Obadaru among the Idoma. The Tiv Kwagh-hir theatre provides memorable entertainment in its dramatization of Tiv folklore and social commentary.

The Tiv as an ethnic group is largely found in Benue State in Nigeria. Omosa (2009) further confirms that, “they are hardworking people who rightly brand themselves as ‘the food basket of the nation’”. Apart from farming, the Tiv in Benue State are embedded and endowed with cultural activities like any other State in Nigeria. Omosa (Ibid) states that, “Benue is also a State of rich cultures and traditions, as exemplified in the world acclaimed Swange dance which has brought fame to both the State and the nation”. Manta (2006) states that,

Swange is a contemporary popular social dance of the Tiv people of Benue State in Central Nigeria. It is a dance of fast, slow, rhythmic and undulating movements, expressing youth and vigour. Swange is played at various types of social and religious functions for the enjoyment of the old and the young. It is heavily percussion-based, aided by a traditional horn (al-gaita), which blows in an unbroken succession for as long as the drumming, singing and dancing is going on.

Manta (Ibid) observed that the dance “particularly exhibits fluidity in body movement, which was inspired by the flow of the River”. Hagher (2003) looks at the characteristics of the dances and concludes that “they are mimetic, abstract and metaphorical in varying degrees”. He also defines Algaita which is the most important instrument in Swange, perhaps in most Tiv music.



A man blowing the algaita (gida) at Swange dance Performance, Zaria,
Source: Sani M.M., 2012.

Abraham (1978) and Bargery (1993) also defined algaita which is also a Hausa word as “a type of reed wind – instrument”, and is called ‘gida’ in Tiv language that,

The gida is a fanned out short pipe instrument, which is blown from the smaller end. It is about one foot long at average and it has four holes, which vary the pitch with extraordinary dexterity. The gida can vary the notes of the song to any level, that it is often used during dance situation, as a speech surrogate. It is in all practical senses a talking flute

Sixfootplus (2007) states that “some Benue artists mix this dance pattern up with their stage performances to the admiration of their fans; notable among these are, Zulezoo, Bravo D and so on”. The rhythmic movements of dancers’ legs, the sonorous songs and sound of the al-gaita was so captivating that it lured the researcher into wanting to find out more about the Swange dance. It is at this point that the interest to adapt the dance steps as vehicle for painting expression came up.



Swange Drummers at a Swange dance Performance, Fine Arts Dept, A.B.U., Zaria, Source: Sani M.M., 2012.



Performing the Swange Dance, Zaria, Source: Sani M.M., 2012.

Aesthetics of Swange

The aesthetics of Swange dance cover a diverse range of aspects which include; the music, musical instruments, costumes, make up, performing time, audience, drama and dance steps. It is from the aforementioned aspects that the artistic beauty of the Swange dance can be appreciated.

Music – Are sounds that produce effects: sounds usually produced by instruments or voices that are arranged or played in order to create effects. Without these arranged sounds produced by the traditional musical instruments and voices, there would almost be no performance, as the performance itself is enhanced by the music. According to Tyonum (1989), “the beauty and grandeur of the Swange dance is enhanced by the use of music which is

adeptly handled by the performers. The drummer, the flutist, the gong and the other musical instruments are harnessed to achieve harmony in the expression of experience. The flutists repeat the song by the music, everyone participates in singing, except the dancers “who are mostly women” (Tyonum, *ibid*).

Musical Instruments – The musical instruments used are a combination of traditional and Western type of instruments. They include whistles, drums of various sizes and sounds from Algaita (gida) which are blown to blend with the drumming. According to Hagher (1980), “A single gida player can render anytime with as much dexterity as would a squad of Scottish bag-pipers”. This is due to the various notes the algaita has.

Costumes – The most conspicuous costumes of this dance form is the angeer cloth which has striped white and black line motifs. The dancers’ dressing is usually provocative. However, in recent times some groups urged moderation. Tyonum (*ibid*) states that; “the costume of Orshio’s players include the famous Angeer cloth which is tied over a pair of shorts. Sometimes a piece of ‘Gberwar’ (a Tiv native cloth) is wrapped round the waist on top of the shorts”.

Apart from the angeer costume, the dancers sometimes wield a horsetail that is waved as they dance which adds dramatic effects. However, there are variations in the use of the costume, but the angeer remains the dominant element. Facial make-up is usually light as the women wear light lipsticks and powder on their faces. The performances mostly take place at night when people have closed and returned from their work places to unwind. The audience too constitutes an important part of the beauty. They stand aside and watch the dancers, donate money to the performers thereby encouraging them to do more.

Dance Steps – Swange dance steps form the core of this investigation as the paper is in essence, exploring the aftermath of the dance steps and movements which includes the foot prints of the Swange dancers. One finds out those gesticulations, gentle swaying of the waist and organized steps are attributes of the said dance. The movements of the body are not forced but swayed gently and calculated thereby, creating a unified rhythm which is likened to the quiet moments of a man and his woman. A much emphasized feature of this dance is the wriggling of the waist by the women which serves as an attraction for the men.

Exploration Stage: Acrylic Medium

Two geometric shapes of canvases; rectangle and square were used as the dancing panel or arena and as the ground on which the colours were finally applied. One dancer was used on a panel, because of the size that is rather small to accommodate many dancers at the same time. The exploration brought in the Swange music and was used to kick start in order to fine tune the upcoming developments: paintings 1, 2 and 3 which

employed the Swange dance in all the development performances. During this exercise, dancers employed the dance steps of Swange.



The dancer on the palette tray (2011),
Source: Sani M.M.

1 A. Dance Steps Inspired by Abua Swange



Performance of Abua Swange Music 1.



Performance of Abua Swange Music 2.



Visual Outcome of Abua Swange,
Artist: Abua,
Year: 2010,
Source: Kpadoo Zipporah Kumaga,
Dancer: Doofan Kwaghod,
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas,
Size: 217cm X 91cm.

B. Dance Steps Inspired by Swange Dance Music



Performance of Swange Music 1.



Performance of Swange Music 2.

Visual Outcome of Swange Dance Music,
Artist: Unknown,
Year: 2010,
Source: YouTube - Swange Dance. WMV. FLV,
Type: FLV File accessed on 28/08/2010, 5:46pm,
Dancer: Doofin, Kwaghool, Medium: Acrylic on
Canvas, Size: 125cm X 122cm.



Developments: Paintings 1 and 2

Two performances were conducted in this group. Two performances were done in the studio. The two categories are the same size. In each level, nine canvases of four squares 92 cm x 92 cm each, a square of 61 cm x 61 cm and four rectangles of 61 cm x 92 cm each were put together to create a large square of 245cm x 245cm as the dance arena. The third painting in this category is the one that was performed outside the studio with thirteen canvases of one canvas as square 122cm x 122cm and twelve rectangles of 122cm x 244cm each and it gives a large square of 6.10 meters x 6.10 meters when put together. The following categorization is made: Developments: Painting 1 = DP1 and Developments: Painting 2 = DP2.

Developments: Painting 1 = DP1



Developments: Painting 1; The process is on.



Developments - P1 (9 units of paintings), (2011), 245cm x 245cm, Acrylic on Canvas.

Four of the nine dance panels are designated canvases only, while the remaining five are designated as both palette and canvases; therefore playing dual roles in this Painting one (1). Three dancers were engaged for the dance, one male and two females. The dancers danced the Swange dance pattern which has a known and fixed choreography. The three dancers are of Tiv origin and they are acquainted with the way Swange is danced. For the harmony of dancing together the dancers had to rehearse the dance steps several times before they finally performed. This performance took place in painting section, 300 Level Studio and in front of spectators. Documentation in both video and still pictures were done together with research assistants.



Researcher's Brushes (Dancers Feet), (2011), 300 Level Painting Studio, Courtesy of Sani, M.M.

Developments: Painting 2 = DP2

In this painting all canvases/supports are both palettes and dance panels. This means that all the nine units of canvases which made up this painting played dual roles: three units carry the three primary colours of yellow, blue and red, while one unit had black as one of the neutral colours designated. The remaining five panels out of nine had the second neutral colour, white.



The Rehearsals, Source Sami M.M., 2012.



Preparing Colours for the Palettes
(DP2 Dance Stage).



Preparing Colours for the DP2 Palettes.



Preparing Colours for the DP2 Palettes.



DP2 Performance, (2011).

The performance began with several rehearsals by the dancers who were four in number. Two males and two females are also of Tiv origin. This was also to obtain the rhythmic flow and uniformity of the dance steps by the dancers. One characteristic of Swange dance is its circular and rhythmic movement in tune with the music. The rehearsal prepared the dancers for the task of dancing on slippery canvas instead of the ordinary floor or ground, which had been the usual dance arena. Within the space of about five minutes, the dance - painting proper, was set.



DP2 Performance , 2011,
(9 units of paintings), 245cm x 245cm, Acrylic on Canvas.

In this Development: Painting 2, performance took place also at the same venue, which is painting section, 300 Level Studio and in front of spectators. Research assistants were engaged along side with the researcher in documentation through both video and still pictures.

Analysis and Interpretation of Paintings Produced

These art works produced and have been categorized into three classifications for easy analysis and discussion. Each category of dance panel has a sub group of canvases that remain canvases, canvases that doubled as canvases and palettes, and they all come together to form the following categories:

DP1 = Developments: Painting 1 – (9 units of paintings), Total Size: 245 cm x 245 cm.

In this category, works were produced as the first set of the experiment under the development of forms. Nine paintings emerged in it, five works of the nine doubled as the palettes and the paintings, while four are designated as the main works. In this regard, the entire compound work has nine designated paintings.

DP1; The Palettes

This category is made up of paintings on platforms that initially stood as palettes for the performance. At the end of the performance they are now part of the composition achieved. As such, they now double as palettes and as canvases.

The DP1, Dance Panel, Size: 245 cm x 245cm

From the individual analysis of the dance panel above, it is obvious that this painting presents a holistic view of all the paintings discussed above. However, its holistic presentation as a unit presents a different analysis as it encompasses all nine distinct units.



Title of Work: DP1 Dance Panel, Finished
Year of Execution: 2011,
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas,
Dimension: 245 cm x 245 cm,
Habitat: Artist Collection.

The painting presents three varieties of sizes. The white palette in the middle is the smallest of the canvases, followed by the canvases with designated palette of red, yellow, blue and black which are positioned in the middle of each side of the square panel. Red is directly opposite black. The rest four canvases are bigger than the designated palettes of red, yellow, blue, black and white.



Title of Work: Detailed View from
Palette: DP1 Dance Panel,
Year of Execution: 2011,
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas,
Dimension: 245 cm x 245 cm,
Habitat: Artist Collection.

Another important feature of this panel is that not all the canvases are palettes. At a glance, one could see that black, red, yellow, blue are designated palettes as the canvases are clearly and richly seen in their designated colours. The smallest canvas in the middle is white, and diagonally next to the white palette are two canvases each from both sides. It is obvious that these particular canvases seen from a diagonal view point have foot prints registration on a white background as they were not designated as palettes. However, the adjoining palettes tend to influence the colour results of the foot prints. For instance the one between red and yellow is dominantly red with traces of yellow. The canvases between yellow and blue are dominated by yellow and blue is dominated by yellow with effects of green and blue. The same also applies to the canvas between blue and black as one could see a dominance of blue with little effects of black. Black also affects the result of the adjoining canvas just before red.

It is worthy of note that the dancers dance in circular formation, moving anti clockwise. This explains the reason why the canvases which are not designated palettes tend to have more of a particular colour. As the dancers dance and move their feet forward in that circular formation, more of the paints from the palette is taken into the adjoining canvas, thereby resulting into a dominance of the colour on the next canvas. This effect can be seen in the canvases immediately after the red, yellow, blue and black palettes.

The overall painting has a circular formation broken by the designated palettes which have a curve that defines the movement of the dancers. The circular movement on this panel shows continuity which is one of the prominent characteristics of Swange dance. This continuity is only seen in this whole dance panel of nine (9) canvases of five (5) palettes and four (4) non – palettes canvases.

In general, the colour distribution of the painting is seen in four defining hues. These are blue, black, red and yellow. The white palette in the middle presents a tint of all the rest of the four colours. Texturally, the painting presents a rough feeling. From a visual perception, one could see that the feet of the dancers have overlapped repeatedly thereby creating a rough visual impression. Repetition as a principle of design is also presented in this painting. This is captured in the repeated footprints that can be seen all over the panel in variety of colours and forms, ultimately creating an abstract expressionist painting.

It is also to be noted that while it is possible to see the footprints, in definitive registration in some parts of the canvases, the designated palettes may not have such definitions. This could be as a result of the amount of water used to thin down the acrylic paints. The water content here was controlled to such a consistency that allowed the foot prints to be registered. Again the designated canvases of red, yellow, blue, black and white have blurred effects of the dancers footprints as a result of the water content factor. Still, one could observe that the canvases that have more definite footprints had no paints and they were dried therefore, enhancing the stronger footprints.

DP1 Summary Conclusion

This analysis looks at a painting that is a compound unit and also divided into nine individual paintings. Five paintings out of the nine are designated as palettes for rendering the entire painting which includes the three primary colours of red, yellow and blue and the two neutral colours of white and black. The remaining four canvases are part of the dance arena that produced their own unique paintings as a result of the dance.

DP2 = Developments: Painting 2 – (9 units of paintings), Total Size: 245 cm x 245 cm.

This category of painting was produced as the second set under the development of forms experiment. Nine paintings also came out, and the entire nine doubled as the palettes and the paintings. This is to observe the kind of effects when wet on wet is performed. It therefore means that every single painting that is also a palette. Just like the first development of forms, this one also has nine designated paintings.

DP2; The Palettes as the Paintings

In this group, the entire canvases served as the palettes and at the same time the canvases on which the paintings stood. In the development of forms (2), the entire canvases were used as palettes. This made every palette to become a painting at the end of the performance. The researcher composed a total of nine canvases with three designated with the red, yellow and blue. Black as a neutral colour had only one palette as the primary colours while the remaining five palettes were designated as white palettes and filled with white acrylic paints. It is important to note that (i) the paints were thinned with much water unlike the previous development: painting '1' and (ii) wet on wet approached was applied.

The DP2, (Dance Panel) Size: 245 cm x 245.



Title of Work: DP2 Dance Panel, Finished Painting,
Year of Execution: 2012,
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas,
Dimension: 245 cm x 245 cm,
Habitat: Artist Collection.

A close appreciation of the work reveals that canvases near a particular palette tend to have an affinity with the palette. For instance blue tends to dominate the canvas next to it on the left. This is more so because the dancers moved in an anticlockwise direction. The canvas between blue and yellow has a blend of yellow domination with prints of blue footprints and traces of green. The red palette has an inflow of blue which result into purple.



Title of Work: Detailed View of DF2 Dance Panel,
Year of Execution: 2012,
Media: Acrylic on Canvas,
Dimension: 245 cm x 245 cm,
Habitat: Artist Collection.

The next palette which is black; changes into shades of grey, and greys of red and yellow. The greys of yellow are more, evident in the adjoining canvas between black and yellow palette. The white palette in the middle is also affected by the colours which have mixed up with it as a result of the dance steps into it.

Fluidity of the impressions has created unique forms. The deliberate thinning of the acrylic paints with much water allowed the paints to easily flow into each other to create abstract fluid forms derived uniquely from feet impressions. Considering the behaviour of acrylic paints, the dancer's foot prints began to register more visibly around the canvas between blue and yellow. This was as a result of the less water in the paint. Consequently, the researcher decided it was time to stop as the intention was to record more fluid dance steps impressions. A close up on the canvases reveals abstract fluid forms or images. These images can best be appreciated and decoded by the viewer who could relate to them in the unique experience as every person's destiny depends on their footprints in life. While some images

are reminiscent of clouds, some like the red palette which is obviously dominated by red, reveals an impression of a blood bath to an abattoir experience. Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa in recent months has led to many violent deaths as well as toppling of long serving rulers. It opens to show that freedom cost blood, especially in countries where the leaders are unwilling to relinquish power. In Nigeria too, the post election violence finds a relationship with this part of the painting. Furthermore, the black palette also presents interesting images. The painting is reminiscent of the aftermath of revolutions, burnt houses, cars and more bomb explosions in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria usually leave such impressions of burnt cars and buildings and even human beings. Further close observations reveals different experiences of our destinies.



In addition, reflection also played an interesting part in the performance. After the performance, the spectators who watched had their images reflected on the painting. This was achieved as a result of the watery surfaces on the canvases. Perhaps, because of the glossy and mirror effects of the colours that had not dried up.

Title of Work: Detailed DP2 Dance Panel,
Year of Execution: 2012,
Medium: Acrylic on Canvas,
Dimension: 245 cm x 245 cm,
Habitat: Artist Collection.

DP2 Summary

In conclusion, the fluid steps impressions present a development from the previous performance which had more clearly imprinted feet as a result of less thinning of the paint. This thinning of the paint has led into an expression of abstract forms realized from the effect of more water in the paint, thereby resulting into images and forms which capture our experiences of the Swange dance performance.

Conclusion

Common characteristics of the palettes are complete colour dominance of the designated palette, smudges as a result of water consistency, spillage effects, multiple colour mixtures and greys of various colours. On the other hand, the designated canvases have the following characteristics, bare portions of canvas, dry footprint effects, definite footprints and an absence of spillage effects resulting from much water, and strong contrast with the background and printed or painted area.

Finally, looking at the first and second development of forms results from the performances, it is seen through the activities; that works created from the Swange dance patterns which are the finished paintings, have the aesthetic qualities of conceptual art expressions created from the footprints.

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