

THE RATIONALE FOR USING FLUID RENDITION IN STUDYING WATERMELON PAINTING.

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Abstract

This paper explores the artistic investigation of the watermelon fruit in painting within studio settings. It probes into the logic behind studio research methodologies, particularly in categorizing paintings based on their unique attributes. The paper critiques the arbitrary expressions and terminology often used by studio researchers, highlighting the importance of reason in categorization. Specifically, it aims to justify the use of fluid rendition in depicting the watermelon fruit in painting. Employing a qualitative approach, the paper examines paintings that embody elements of fluidity, analysing studio results inspired by the fluid characteristics of the watermelon. Examples such as “Race of Destiny” “Entangled,” “Paradox” and “Secret Battle” are discussed in the context of contemporary human experiences.

Keywords: Fluidity, Watermelon, Painting, Categorization

Introduction

Within the space of artistic research in painting, many artists find comfort in the logical categorization of their works, a trend evident in numerous Master of Fine Arts theses and Painting PhD dissertations within Nigerian universities. This categorization often reflects the stages of artistic exploration

or investigation. Artists frequently classify their results under stages such as realistic, semi-realistic, and abstraction, demonstrating a progression from known paradigms to the exploration of the unknown in education. Similarly, other artists may define these stages as exploratory and developmental, subsequently analysing and presenting their findings. In certain unique

studio experiments and investigations, researchers employ creative terms specific to their topics, such as the concept of fluid rendition.

Gyegwe (2008, 2017), Gyegwe, and Haruna (2017) initially addressed the foundation of this study in a series of investigations into the watermelon fruit in painting. These studies identified seven stages to achieve the objectives, aiming to explore the watermelon beyond its superficial appeal and aesthetic form. The use of a microscope became essential in facilitating this internal investigation, contrasting with the standard practices of artists from the cave period to the postmodern era. One of the seven established stages was fluid rendition. This application was not arbitrary but justified on logical grounds. The term "fluid" refers to a liquid substance that can flow freely and without resistance to external factors. The movement of water in a river exemplifies this fluid characteristic.

Fluidity and Other Artists

The fluid element is evident in the paintings of various artists, though their focus has often been on the medium rather than the subject. Kleiner (2011) notes, "By 1950, Pollock had refined his technique and was producing large-scale abstract paintings such as Number 1, 1950... This work consists of rhythmic drips, splatters, and dribbles of paint." Jackson Pollock's technique showcases an artist's unconscious benefit from fluidity in painting. Similarly, Muazu et al. (2013) also benefited from the fluid characteristic of a watery acrylic medium in his blend of Swange dance and painting, where abstract forms and expressions were created through the flow of paint. These examples highlight artists using fluid paints to express their ideas, whereas this paper focuses on the fluid subject as a basis for categorization and inspiration in painting.

The Fluidity of the Watermelon

The watermelon, by nature, has a high water content, which has been scientifically established. Brittany (2011) states, "Watermelon: Its very name should clue you in that watermelon is 93 percent water. You don't always have to eat your watermelon straight off the rind." Due to its high water content, watermelon is popular in fasting, especially among Islamic adherents. Its hydration properties contribute to better health for the consumer.

In the Holy Bible, the psalmist supports this dietary regimen, writing, "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth" (Psalm 104:14). Diet is a crucial aspect of a spiritual aspirant's regimen, as emphasized by atmajyoti.org: "it will determine the quality and effectiveness of his meditation experience." The website further illustrates, "just as soft wet wax readily takes the impression of a print and

retains it (in contrast to cold hard wax) so the mind formed of light and pure food energies like fruits will respond most readily and permanently to vibrations and impressions produced by meditation." This underscores the fluidity of the fruit.

The fluidity of the watermelon is further demonstrated by its behaviour in the studio. The fruit has a short lifespan once cut open and left unrefrigerated, decomposing rapidly into a watery and pulpy state. Often, its contents flow onto the table and drip to the floor. This flowing characteristic, producing an aesthetic attraction, served as the basis for contemplating and justifying the watermelon in the fluid rendition.

Examination of Fluid Rendition in Watermelon Art

Expanding on the fluid rendition concept, this study meticulously examines how the fluid nature of the watermelon can be a driving force for artistic expression. The term "fluid" is not merely descriptive but also conceptual,

guiding the artist's technique and approach.

When an artist engages with the watermelon, they are not just painting a fruit; they are capturing the essence of its fluidity, its tendency to change form, and its inherent life cycle. This dynamic aspect makes the watermelon a powerful subject for exploring themes of impermanence, transformation, and the beauty inherent in natural processes.

Artists like Gyegwe have utilized tools such as microscopes to delve into the microstructures of the watermelon, uncovering patterns and forms that are invisible to the naked eye. This microscopic view allows for a deeper appreciation of the watermelon's complexity and a more intricate representation of the artwork. The fluidity observed at this level reflects broader artistic themes, resonating with the fluidity found in other natural and human-made systems.

Wider Implications of Fluid Rendition

The implications of fluid rendition extend beyond the scope of painting and artistic research. By adopting a fluid approach, artists and researchers can challenge and expand existing paradigms in various fields. This method encourages a holistic view, considering the interconnectedness of elements within a subject. For instance, the study of the watermelon's fluidity can inspire new techniques in sculpture, installation art, and digital media, where the concept of fluidity can be translated into physical and virtual forms.

Moreover, the fluid rendition aligns with contemporary ecological and environmental concerns. By emphasizing the natural properties of subjects like the watermelon, artists can draw attention to broader issues of sustainability and the importance of preserving natural resources. This approach not only enriches artistic practice but also

contributes to a deeper understanding of our relationship with the natural world.

Furthermore, the exploration of fluid rendition through the lens of the watermelon fruit reveals the importance of specificity and depth in artistic research. It advocates for a categorization system that is intimately tied to the subject's unique attributes, promoting a more informed and inspired artistic practice. This approach not only enriches the understanding of the subject but also enhances the creative process, leading to works that are both innovative and deeply connected to their material origins.

By grounding artistic investigations in the inherent properties of their subjects, artists can produce works that are more resonant and meaningful. The fluid rendition, as exemplified by the watermelon studies, demonstrates the potential for a deeper engagement with the subject matter, fostering a richer and more dynamic exploration of art.

This methodology encourages artists to move

beyond traditional frameworks, embracing the unique characteristics of their subjects to create more impactful and authentic art. Furthermore, it highlights the broader implications of such an approach, offering new insights into ecological sustainability and interdisciplinary research, thereby setting a precedent for future artistic and academic inquiries. Plate I



Artist: Gabriel Gyegwe

Title: Race of Destiny- 2005

Medium: Enamel on Canvas.
110x80cm.

Source: Researcher

"Race of Destiny" shown in plate I

explores the intricate and symbolic interior of

the watermelon, drawing a profound comparison to the woman's womb and the miraculous process of conception. This metaphorical exploration parallels the hidden act of conception, an intimate process often shrouded in privacy and societal discretion. While the act of conception is conducted in secrecy, its results (the creation of new life) become visible and celebrated within a few months.

The abstraction in "Race of Destiny" is conveyed through the contemplation of the decomposing interior of the watermelon. This choice of subject matter and its state of transformation echo the themes of hidden processes and eventual revelation. As the watermelon's interior decays, it undergoes a transformation, mirroring the secretive and transformative journey of conception and pregnancy. The use of a decomposing fruit not only emphasizes the transient nature of life but also reflects on the hidden beauty and complexity within natural processes.

The technique employed in this artwork involves pouring paint onto the support and then using a brush to direct the flow, creating an organic and fluid composition. This method of paint application is deliberate, mirroring the natural flow and movement found within the watermelon and the biological processes it symbolizes. The act of guiding the paint flow with a brush reflects the artist's intent to shape and control the creative process, much like the natural yet guided progression of conception and gestation.

The fluid dynamics of the paint, as it moves and mingles on the canvas, capture the essence of fluidity and transformation inherent in both the watermelon and the womb. This technique allows for a spontaneous yet controlled creation of forms and patterns, symbolizing the unpredictable yet directed nature of life's creation. The resulting imagery is a blend of abstract shapes and flowing lines, evoking the inner

structures of the watermelon and the metaphorical womb.

"Race of Destiny" thus becomes a powerful visual narrative that intertwines biological and artistic processes. By abstracting the decomposing interior of the fruit, the artwork invites viewers to contemplate the hidden yet essential aspects of life and creation. It challenges societal norms about discussing conception and pregnancy openly, suggesting that the beauty and complexity of these processes deserve recognition and reflection.

Furthermore, the decomposing watermelon serves as a poignant metaphor for the cycle of life and death. As the fruit breaks down, it gives rise to new forms and shapes on the canvas, much like how the process of birth and creation is both an end and a beginning. This cyclical nature is intrinsic to both the watermelon and the process of conception, reinforcing the themes of continuity and regeneration.

This piece stands as a testament to the artist's ability to translate profound biological and societal themes into visual art. It exemplifies the use of abstraction to delve into deeply personal and universal experiences, offering a new perspective on the intersection of natural processes and human life. Through the fluid rendition technique, "Race of Destiny" captures the essence of transformation, hidden beauty, and the inevitable revelation of life's secret acts.

The work also serves as a broader commentary on the passage of time and the unseen forces that shape our existence. Just as the interior of the watermelon transforms and decays, so too do the moments of conception and gestation unfold over time, hidden from view until their culmination. This hidden progression is a powerful reminder of the many facets of life that operate beneath the surface, unseen yet profoundly impactful.

By focusing on the fluidity and transformation of the watermelon, "Race of Destiny" invites viewers to reflect on their perceptions of creation and the often unspoken aspects of human life. It encourages a deeper appreciation for the processes that occur behind the scenes, both in nature and within ourselves. This profound connection between art and life underscores the significance of exploring subjects with depth and sensitivity, fostering a greater understanding of the world around us.

In conclusion, "Race of Destiny" is not just a painting but also a thoughtful exploration of life's hidden processes, rendered through the fluid and transformative nature of the watermelon. It challenges conventional narratives and encourages viewers to engage with the underlying beauty and complexity of creation, offering a rich and layered interpretation of the natural world.

Another painting; "Entangled" (shown in Plate II) expresses the complexities of contemporary marriage, presenting a vivid and symbolic representation of the challenges faced by couples in an era of acculturation and cultural blending. The artwork seeks to encapsulate the reality of how individuals often find themselves caught between their own cultural identities and the influences of external, often alien, cultural norms. This tension is visually articulated through the depiction of a couple, centrally positioned and encircled on the canvas, symbolizing their entrapment within the institution of marriage.

The central figures of the couple, intertwined and encircled, embody the notion of entanglement. This metaphorical entanglement represents the intricate and often inescapable web of expectations, compromises, and conflicts that arise within a marriage. The painting captures the moment when the initial allure and romance

give way to the stark realities of each partner's shortcomings and excesses. This transition from idealization to confrontation is a common theme in many marriages, where the idealized version of a partner is replaced by the reality of their true nature.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in "Entangled." The use of watermelon seeds as representations of sperm signifies fertility and the creation of new life, which are fundamental aspects of marriage and relationships. These seeds, scattered across the canvas, highlight the biological and reproductive elements that bind the couple together, adding layers of meaning to their entanglement. The seeds serve as a reminder of the physical and emotional investments made within the relationship, which further complicate the dynamics of their union.

Additionally, the heart symbol, traditionally representing love, is used here to underscore the emotional core of the couple's connection.

However, in "Entangled," the heart also

symbolizes the complexities and contradictions inherent in love and marriage. While love is the foundation that brought the couple together, it is also the source of their struggles and conflicts. The juxtaposition of the heart with the entanglement motif suggests that love is not always pure and simple but is often fraught with difficulties and challenges.

A philosophical dimension is introduced through the contrast between the container and the content, a theme that runs throughout the painting. The couple, as the container, represents the outward appearance and societal expectations of marriage. In contrast, the content (their true selves, with all their flaws and excesses) remains hidden beneath the surface. This dichotomy highlights the disparity between the idealized version of marriage and the complex reality experienced by the individuals within it. The painting suggests that the outward appearance of a

relationship can be deceiving, masking the deeper, more intricate truths that lie within.

The painting also explores the impact of cultural influences on personal identities and relationships. In an age of globalization, couples often find themselves influenced by a myriad of external cultural norms, which can lead to internal conflicts and pressures within the marriage. "Entangled" highlights the struggle to balance these external influences with personal identity and cultural heritage, emphasizing the tension between adapting to new cultural norms and maintaining one's own cultural identity.

"Entangled" thus becomes a powerful commentary on the nature of modern relationships. It challenges viewers to consider the impact of cultural influences on personal identities and relationships, urging a reflection on the pressures and expectations placed on couples. The artwork invites an

exploration of the deeper philosophical questions surrounding love, identity, and the true nature of commitment. By capturing these elements, "Entangled" offers a nuanced and thought-provoking perspective on the reality of marriage in today's world.

In summary, "Entangled" (Plate II) uses rich symbolism and a philosophical approach to depict the complexities of marriage. Through the portrayal of a couple encircled and entangled, the painting explores themes of cultural influence, personal identity, and the dichotomy between appearance and reality. The symbolic use of watermelon seeds and the heart enriches the narrative, adding layers of meaning that resonate with the viewer's own experiences and reflections on love and relationships.



Plate II

Artist: Gabriel Gyegwe

Title: Entangled- 2005

Medium: Oil on Canvas. 101x81cm.

Source: Researcher

The painting captures the philosophical dimension of the container not being the same as the content.

"Paradox" (Plate III) presents a haunting composition of faces in agony, drawing inspiration from the decaying form of a watermelon. Executed in black and white pastel on paper, this artwork serves as a visceral commentary on the pervasive impact of high-scale corruption in Nigeria, resulting

in profound economic hardship and societal distress.

The composition centres around a series of faces contorted in anguish, each bearing the scars of hardship and suffering. The face positioned in the top right-hand corner dominates the composition, its mouth agape in pain and its lone eye closed in despair. Adjacent to it lies another face, its eye bearing the weight of disfigurement wrought by the hardships endured. The lower portion of the composition features a mouth torn open, symbolizing the harsh reality of the moment and the pervasive nature of suffering.

The use of black and white pastel enhances the starkness of the imagery, creating a visual contrast that accentuates the depth of despair depicted. The dark shades evoke a sense of foreboding and melancholy, while the white areas pierce through the darkness, highlighting the raw emotions conveyed by the faces.

Embedded within the imagery is a poignant commentary on the political landscape of Nigeria, particularly during the tenure of the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led administration in 2017. Against the backdrop of economic recession, exacerbated by the removal of fuel subsidy by the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023, the nation grapples with a myriad of challenges. These include skyrocketing food prices, attacks on farmers, erratic power supply, currency devaluation, rampant kidnappings, and a pervasive sense of insecurity. (Onafowokan, 2024)

The painting serves as a profound contemplation of the fluid interior of the watermelon, juxtaposing the fleeting nature of life and abundance with the harsh realities of corruption and economic hardship. Through its poignant imagery and stark symbolism, "Paradox" prompts viewers to confront the paradoxical nature of existence,

wherein beauty and decay, abundance and deprivation, coexist in uneasy harmony.

In essence, "Paradox" (Plate III) stands as a powerful testament to the resilience of the Nigerian people in the face of adversity, while also serving as a scathing indictment of the political and economic forces that perpetuate suffering and inequality. Through its evocative imagery and social commentary, the painting transcends its medium, inviting viewers to engage with the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society and the enduring struggle for justice and equality.



Plate III

Artist: Gabriel Gyegwe

Title: Paradox- 2005

Medium: Pastel on paper. 92x62cm.

Source: Researcher



Plate IV

Artist: Gabriel Gyegwe

Title: Secret Battle- 2005

Medium: Pastel on paper. 90x75cm.

Source: Researcher

"Secret Battle" (Plate IV) offers a captivating exploration of the clandestine conflicts that unfold in the depths of the human psyche and the spiritual realm. Through a composition characterized by flowing amoebic forms and contrasting light and dark tones, the painting evokes a sense of dramatic tension and existential struggle.

At the centre of the composition, asymmetrical balance is achieved as amoebic forms converge, creating a dynamic visual narrative. Light and dark tones interplay to heighten the sense of drama, casting the scene in an aura of mystery and obscurity. Amidst this enigmatic backdrop, two creatures engage in a fierce battle, their identities obscured yet their conflict palpable.

The creature positioned atop the composition bears resemblance to a bird of prey, perhaps an eagle, wielding its weapon-like beak to subdue its adversary. Its aggressive stance and formidable presence suggest a relentless

pursuit of dominance and victory. In contrast, the subdued creature below writhes in agony, its open mouth emitting white wavy lines that extend into oblivion. This visual motif symbolizes the creature's anguished cry, echoing into the depths of the unknown.

The juxtaposition of black and white within the composition serves to underscore the timeless struggle between good and evil. The interplay of light and shadow becomes a metaphor for the eternal conflict between opposing forces, each vying for supremacy in the cosmic battle of morality and righteousness.

Beyond the physical realm depicted in the painting, "Secret Battle" captures the metaphysical dimensions of human existence. The skirmish between the two creatures serves as a metaphor for the secret battles fought within the spiritual landscape of the soul. It reflects the internal struggles, temptations, and triumphs experienced by

individuals as they navigate the complexities of life and morality.

Ultimately, "Secret Battle" offers a profound meditation on the nature of human existence and the eternal struggle between light and darkness. Through its evocative imagery and symbolic language, the painting invites viewers to contemplate the hidden battles that shape the course of human destiny, both in the material world and beyond. It serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring conflict between good and evil and the eternal quest for spiritual enlightenment and transcendence.

Conclusion

The concept of fluid rendition arises from the inherent behavioural traits of the watermelon fruit, capturing its natural flow and aesthetic appeal. This unique approach highlights aspects of the fruit that have often been overlooked in artistic investigations by other artists. Studio researchers frequently use

broad terms to categorize works within a specific group or stage of their research. However, this paper argues that such categorizations should be grounded in the distinctive characteristics of the form or subject being explored, rather than relying on arbitrary expressions that may lack a direct connection to the subject under study.

By focusing on the watermelon's fluidity, this study not only underscores the significance of examining the intrinsic properties of the subject but also opens up new avenues for artistic expression and interpretation. The fluid rendition goes beyond conventional methods, offering a fresh perspective that challenges traditional categorizations in art. It encourages artists to delve deeper into the unique traits of their subjects, allowing for more nuanced and meaningful representations.

Furthermore, this approach can be applied to various other subjects in artistic research, promoting a more personalized and subject-specific method of categorization. By doing so, artists can achieve a deeper understanding and appreciation of their subjects, leading to more innovative and authentic works of art. The fluid rendition thus serves as a compelling example of how artistic investigation can benefit from a closer examination of the subject's inherent properties, fostering a richer and more dynamic exploration of art.

This method also provides a framework for redefining artistic processes and outcomes, encouraging a shift from generic classifications to more specific and descriptive terms. By anchoring categorizations in the unique qualities of the subject, artists can create more intentional and resonant pieces that reflect a deeper engagement with their materials. The fluid rendition approach exemplifies how a

detailed study of an element's characteristics—such as the watermelon's high water content and decomposition behaviour—can lead to a more profound artistic insight and innovation.

Moreover, this study's focus on fluidity aligns with contemporary trends in art that emphasize process and materiality. It reflects a broader movement towards understanding and utilizing the inherent properties of materials to guide artistic creation. This alignment not only situates the study within current artistic discourse but also highlights

its relevance and potential impact on future artistic practices.

In conclusion, the exploration of fluid rendition through the lens of the watermelon fruit reveals the importance of specificity and depth in artistic research. It advocates for a categorization system that is intimately tied to the subject's unique attributes, promoting a more informed and inspired artistic practice. This approach not only enriches the understanding of the subject but also enhances the creative process, leading to works that are both innovative and deeply connected to their material origins.

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