

EXPLORING CLOTH AS MEDIUM AND METAPHOR IN NIGERIAN ART ECOLOGY AND SCHOLARSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Cloth has evolved over time from a mere utilitarian material into a critical visual language capable of generating multiple meanings. This paper examines the dynamic role of cloth as both medium and metaphor within the Nigerian art ecology, revealing how artists employ it to communicate identity, cultural memory, and socio-political commentary. Using a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative methodology, the study engages the tools of iconography, semiotics, and ekphrasis to analyse selected works of contemporary Nigerian artists such as El Anatsui, Nike Okundaye, Peju Alatise, Peju Layiwola, Ozioma Onuzulike, and Eva Obodo from the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art. Findings indicate that these artists reconfigure traditional textile forms into conceptual vehicles that bridge indigenous knowledge systems and modern artistic expression. Through this process, cloth transcends its material function to become a site of metaphor and meaning-making, reflecting issues of gender, identity, memory, and sustainability. The paper contributes to scholarship in Nigerian and African art history by expanding the understanding of how cloth operates as a semiotic and aesthetic framework that shapes contemporary artistic discourse and ecological thinking.

Keywords: Nigerian Art, Cloth, Textile, Semiotics, Metaphor, Iconography, Art Ecology.

Introduction

Textiles have, over time, transcended their utilitarian function and evolved into a highly expressive visual language within modern and contemporary Nigerian art. Beyond its domestic and economic value, cloth has become a source of conceptual exploration through which artists interrogate identity, gender, memory, environment, and cultural continuity. As Dike (2011) observes, the expansion of textile practices into three-dimensional forms has “widened its horizons” as a creative medium, confirming Waller’s (1977) earlier assertion that fibre and thread had become defining materials of a new artistic movement. Across Africa, artists have consistently drawn inspiration from indigenous textile traditions, using

fibre, pattern, and dye to produce some of the continent’s most compelling aesthetic statements (Gumpert, 2008).

During my visit to the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art (YSMA) in 2020, a collection that houses over a thousand works spanning Nigeria’s modern and post-independence periods, numerous artworks revealed the deep integration of textile forms within contemporary practice. The experience demonstrated that many artists, such as David Dale, Zacheus Oloruntoba, Peju Alatise, Nike Okundaye, and Ozioma Onuzulike, have consistently incorporated fabric, thread, and fibre in their creative vocabulary, even when primarily known as painters or sculptors. These encounters foreground the argument

that the appropriation of cloth as both medium and metaphor is neither accidental nor recent, but an evolving practice requiring systematic scholarly attention.

A growing number of Nigerian artists use textiles not merely as decorative material but as a conceptual and semiotic system.

Artists including El Anatsui, Peju Layiwola, Eva Obodo, Olarenwaju Tejuosho, and Ayobola Kekere-Ekun manipulate cloth to articulate narratives about the body, community, faith, and ecology. Their work exemplifies how textile engagement expands the possibilities of contemporary Nigerian art.

Although previous literature (Eiccher, 1976; Oguibe, 2003; Okeke-Agulu, 2015; Akinbileje, 2014; Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009) acknowledges cloth as a cultural signifier and record of identity, few studies critically examine its transformation into an intellectual, symbolic, and aesthetic medium within Nigeria's contemporary art ecology. Existing research demonstrates its social significance but neglects its artistic and theoretical implications. Consequently, Nigerian artists' contributions to the reinterpretation of cloth as metaphor remain under-documented in art-historical discourse. This paper, therefore, explores cloth as both medium and metaphor in Nigerian contemporary art, analysing how selected artists from the YSMA collection and beyond deploy textile materials and ideas to construct meaning. It employs a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative methodology, drawing upon semiotics, iconography, and ekphrasis to unpack the material and metaphorical dimensions of

textile-based art. The purposive selection of notable practitioners, such as El Anatsui, Peju Alatisi, Nike Okundaye, Peju Layiwola, Ozioma Onuzulike, Eva Obodo, and Zacheus Oloruntoba, provides a representative cross-section of these explorations.

The study contributes to the discourse on Nigerian contemporary art in four key ways- Bridging methodological gaps. It introduces a semiotic and ekphrastic approach to analysing textile art forms, enabling a richer interpretation beyond formal or ethnographic readings, expanding art-historical understanding by situating cloth within Nigeria's art ecology as both process and metaphor, linking traditional weaving and dyeing heritage to modern conceptual practice, highlighting diversity of engagement by focusing on multiple generations of artists, it demonstrates how cloth's aesthetic and cultural language adapts to issues such as gender relations, sustainability, and postcolonial identity and strengthening scholarly documentation: It provides critical narrative evidence from a major institutional collection (YSMA), filling a notable gap in Nigerian art scholarship. Through this framework, the paper positions cloth as a multivalent sign system; a medium that both carries history and generates new meaning. The ensuing sections examine how Nigerian artists employ textile materials as creative, symbolic, and communicative tools, and how these practices contribute to broader discussions on culture, ecology, and meaning-making in contemporary African art.

A trip through the floors of the YSMA reveals that the appropriation of cloth and other textile materials by artists as medium and metaphor is not a recent occurrence. For example, it was not until my visit to the museum that I realised that many artists, who were otherwise described as painters or sculptors, have also explored cloth, threads, fibres, wool and other textile forms in their creative explorations. Some of the works of David Dale and Zacheus Oloruntoba, who are well known for their explorations in oil, water colour, stained glass and etching, show that while they explored other techniques, they also had a great interest in working with textile materials for their works. For example, a close-up image of Zacheus Oloruntoba's untitled piece shows that he explored embroidery thread to create an image of a Yoruba drummer (Figure 1). These discoveries heightened my interest in looking at other artists in terms of how they have explored cloth and other textile materials. I began to see that modern and contemporary Nigerian arts are full of artists who engage cloth and other forms of textiles in their creative explorations. Among these are works of artists like Nike Okundaye (figure 2), Ozioma Onuzulike, Peju Layiwola (figure 3), Peju Alatise (figure 4), Eva Obodo (figure 5) and Ozioma Onuzulike (figure 6). This sharpened my curiosity to find out when and how this practice began and the trajectories of its development. This is because I am convinced from the visual and material evidence at the YSMA that even though many contemporary artists in recent times seem to have discovered new vistas of exploration in cloth and other textile forms, it is a practice that has been

existent in the Nigerian art scene but not given the scholarly attention it deserves.



Fig.1:ZachaeusOloruntoba, Untitled, Year of production unknown, embroidery on board.



Fig.2:Nike Okundaye, Untitled, 2003, mixed media



Fig.3:PejuLayiwola, Stamping Histories, 2020, Wax stamps, Installation.



Fig. 4: Peju Alatise, *The Nine Year Old Bride*, 2010, mixed media, 275cm x 120cm



Fig. 5: Eva Obodo, *Two Heads Four Eyes*, 2015, mixed media, 125cm x 175cm



Fig. 6: Ozioma Onuzulike, *Armour For The Giant Of Africa*, mixed media, 2017, 200cm x 360cm

Indeed, a growing number of contemporary artists in Nigeria have directly or indirectly drawn from textile materials or textile features as conceptual and design sources for their studio production. Important examples of artists working in this mode include Peju Alatise, Anthea Epelle, Uchay Joel Chima,

Olarenwaju Tejuosho, El Anatsui, Ozioma Onuzulike, Jimoh Buraimoh and Nike Okundaye Davies. A closer look also shows that there are a number of other Nigerian artists that draw inspiration from textile features or explore its physical possibilities for their mixed media work. These include such other artists as Jacob Jari, Kolade Oshinowo, Obinna Makata, Victor Ekpuk, Moyo Ogundipe, Onyema Offoedu-Okeke and Babalola Lawson. From these artists, I have tentatively selected El Anatsui, Nike Okundaye, Peju Alatise, Zacheus Oloruntoba, Ayobola Kekere-Ekun, Eva Obodo, Ozioma Onuzulike, Peju Layiwola and Olarenwaju Tejuosho for a closer study because they appear to have explored this mode more consistently. I am interested in studying how the works of these artists in the collection of the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Lagos, have explored cloth and other textile forms in their creative engagements.

Extant literature on African art history has revealed and emphasised the importance of cloth in forging identities (Eicher, 1976; Oguibe, 2003; Okeke-Agulu, 2015; Enwezor, 2001) and preserving cultural histories and identities (Akinbileje, 2014; Cyril-Egware, 2015). In some cases, artists have revealed new vistas of creative exploration using cloth and its related forms or creative formats (Dike, 2011). In the same vein, studio experiments of artists as well as the critical interventions of several scholars have revealed the artistic potential in cloth and African textile structures and displays as a creative resource (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009; Fosu, 2002; Oguibe, 2003). These have been demonstrated in key exhibitions of

African art and artists (for example, Gumpert, 2008 and Alisa & Christine, 2008). However, it has hardly been critically and historically examined or discussed how artists have used cloth or textile forms and ideas to make contributions to the development of contemporary art in Nigeria. In other words, Nigerian contemporary artists have relied heavily on cloth and other textile forms as a creative resource for their studio production, many of which have received recognition in important galleries and museums within and outside Nigeria, including the YSMA in Lagos. Yet, there has not been any major scholarly account of this trend in Nigerian art history. Some of the questions that have plagued this research include; how did the idea of artists' appropriation of cloth and other textile ideas, forms and structures as medium and metaphor develop and gained currency over time in the Nigerian art scene, using examples from the collection of the YSMA, what kinds of technical approaches have been explored by these artists in their engagements with cloth and other textile forms, what are the thematic and conceptual directions that have emerged over time and how can we account for them?

Also, this research focuses on examining cloth and highlighting the functions as a medium and metaphor in the Nigerian contemporary art ecology through the works of selected Nigerian contemporary artists. How did the idea of artists' appropriation of cloth and other textile ideas, forms and structures as medium and metaphor develop and gain currency over time, especially in the Nigerian art scene,

what kinds of technical and pedagogical approaches have been explored by these artists in their experiments with cloth and other textile materials and the investigations into thematic and conceptual directions that have emerged from these experiments.

This research focuses on the practice of selected artists whose works are in the collection of the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, Ibeju Lekki, in Lagos State. This is because the museum holds a large collection of the works of many contemporary artists spanning over 40 years. Some of these artists whose works are housed in the YSMA, which will foreground this research, include Peju Alatise, Zacheus Oloruntoba, Olarenwaju Tejuosho, Eva Obodo, El Anatsui, Ozioma Onuzulike, Victor Ekpuk, Peju Layiwola, Ayobola Kekere-Ekun and Nike Okundaye Davies. Other artists whose works are not reflected in the YSMA museum, but also fit into the frame of this research may be referenced in the study. In other words, the study will accommodate references to artists who have explored cloth, fiber, twine, yarn and other textile forms, materials and processes in their creative explorations. They include Jacob Jari, Kolade Oshinowo, Obinna Makata, Moyo Ogundipe, Onyema Offoedu-Okeke, Uzoma Samuel Anyanwu, Jacqueline Suowari and Babalola Lawson. This inquiry will provide fresh perspectives to the history of the use of cloth as a creative resource in the works of modern and contemporary African artists. It will also provide insights into the semiotic, iconology and iconography associated with the practice of these artists. In other words,

this study will interrogate the works within the frame work of dual texts as expressive modes that embody multiple signs. Review of literature has revealed that nobody appears to have looked at the selected artists within the framework of the signs their work embody. This is what this investigation will strive to bring to the fore. In other words, this research will attempt to make the 'visible' in the works under review 'legible'. It will enable art enthusiasts to engage the works of art and experience more than its visual elements by being led into the conceived messages that the works embody. In doing this, this study will reveal the multivalent and polysemic values of the works of art, which opens up areas for interrogation of signs. This is an area art historical discourses in Nigeria have often evaded and it is in my opinion very integral to the study of African art history.

This study adopts a qualitative design. It also appropriates a descriptive and correlational approach which will engage semiotics, conceptually and methodologically, to convey meaning. This will be possible because postmodern thought on creative engagements harps on theories which allow new research to bring to the fore new vistas for previous narratives on a subject (in this case, art works).

The sampling technique for this research is qualitative and purposive. Purposive sampling requires a selective and judgmental approach to data collection rather than a random approach. Here, the respondents, or in this case studio artists, are required to be people who have over time gathered some level of experience and expertise in their studio explorations

and can give correct and concise information that would aid the progress of the research. This means that this research would require personal interaction with these artists and in some cases, monitor their studio processes. This process is designed within the purview of intensive literature engagement and collection of visuals that are to be analysed and evaluated.

The data collected are analysed with a focus on the formal attributes and conceptual significations. In other words, formal analysis is be a major tool for understanding the features of the works. Iconology also plays major role in my analysis and interpretation of the artists' use of cloth and textile forms in a metaphorical manner. This makes certain that the contextual and metaphorical meanings embedded in the works under evaluation are determined. The qualitative approach to this research will explore the inherent advantages in the mechanisms of meaning-making in art history. Pertinent to this work, therefore, are semiotics and studies in iconography and iconology. Both methods are similar and amenable to provide insights into the nature of the work of art as a sign or an icon as they dovetail in the practice of art history as ekphrasis.

The experiments in fibre art and textile sculpture by Ifedioranma Dike and Diogu Godson are well-expressed validations of the creative potential and assortment of possibilities in cloth and other textile forms (Dike, 2003; Dike, 2011, p. 3). Apart from the appropriation of cloth and other textile forms by artists, there is hardly any aspect of life where cloth and textile forms do not play a pivotal role. Little wonder many artists have drawn

inspiration from its resources. Several diasporan artists of African origin have engaged the use of cloth and other textile forms either as conceptual ideas or direct appropriations to situate themselves within a particular history or cultural affiliation. This is perhaps because studies have shown that cloth is one of the easiest ways to determine the culture and history of a group of people.

Cloth, Identity and Cultural Memory

Studies in African material culture have long affirmed that cloth operates as more than functional fabric: it performs socially significant and communicative roles. Eicher (1976) documented Nigerian handcrafted textiles and regional weaving practices from Akwete to Abeokuta, demonstrating how motifs encode historical continuity. Building on this, Eicher and Erekesima (1995) and Cyril-Egware (2015) position cloth as a primary marker of identity and non-verbal communication, while Akinbileje (2014) connects textile use to the preservation of cultural memory. In Nigeria, cloth historically signified hierarchy, gender, moral status, and spirituality (Adesanya, 2005; Akinbileje, 2014). During the colonial period, Cyril-Egware (2015) records that parents with multiple pupils were taxed in pieces of cloth, a telling instance of its economic and symbolic currency. Such examples reveal that textiles operated as a social connector, transcending geographic and temporal boundaries.

Textiles as Symbol and Semiotic Medium

Cloth's symbolic potency extends into contemporary art practice. Obari (2012) identifies dress in literature and art as a form of moral commentary, while Nwafor (2012, 2013) interprets the *aso-ebi* tradition as signifying friendship and solidarity. Similarly, Bell-Gam (2008) and Gomba (2012) associate cloth display with wealth and prestige. Collectively, these studies position fabric as an active sign system where pattern, motif, and colour communicate nuanced meanings. Kojo (2000) and Gumpert (2008) advance this discourse by addressing the transformation of fibrous materials into new art forms. Gumpert argues that fibre possesses mnemonic properties, its transparency and tactility enabling artists to visualise fragility, absence, or continuity. These insights reinforce Bal's (1994) semiotic position that images, like linguistic texts, generate meaning through systems of signs.

Analysing diasporic negotiations of identity, Oguibe (2003) highlights the work of Yinka Shonibare, whose installation *Double Dutch* symbolically confronts views of Africa through the appropriation of Dutch wax print. For Oguibe, Shonibare's practice "outwits and subverts" the culture of difference within global art circuits (p. 40). His engagement demonstrates how cloth functions as both aesthetic and ideological statement; simultaneously global and locally referential. Other diaspora-linked studies (Nzegwu, 2021; Onuoha, 2017) link attire and identity construction, showing that

dress performs narrative functions in museum representation and intercultural dialogue. These analyses expand the notion of cloth beyond physicality into cultural semiotics. Within Nigeria, the most popular and sustained exploration of cloth as metaphor appears in the works of El Anatsui. Numerous scholars (Picton, 1998; Houghton, 1998; Peri-Willis, 1998; Vogel, 2013; Binder, 2010; Okeke-Agulu, 2010; and Sanyal, 2014) describe his shimmering metal tapestries as visual analogues of strip-woven textiles, positioning them within debates on consumerism and postcolonial trade. Yet the focus on Anatsui has often overshadowed others whose textile experimentation is equally profound. While Okeke-Agulu (2015) and Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009) trace Nigerian modernism through the “natural synthesis” ideology, their emphasis on painting and sculpture means textile media remain under-examined. Similarly, Kasfir (2000) and Oloidi (2009) discuss modernisation and postcolonial identity yet omit analysis of medium transformation. Recent Curatorial initiatives such as La Gamma and Giutini’s (2008) exhibition *The Poetics of Cloth* highlight fabric’s historic and aesthetic continuity across sub-Saharan Africa, reinforcing the necessity to evaluate Nigerian artists within that global textile tradition. The reviewed scholarship collectively validates cloth as an art-historical and anthropological medium for identity, symbolism, and cultural preservation. However, the theoretical dialogue between cloth as metaphor and cloth as method, interpreted semiotically or ekphrastically remains

under-developed. This study therefore responds to that gap by reading selected Nigerian works through the frameworks of semiotics, iconography, and ekphrasis, interpreting cloth simultaneously as sign and as site of meaning-making.

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative design suited to contextual analysis of artworks. This orientation allows for the exploration of layered cultural meanings embedded in artistic form, colour, and material. The interpretative arm follows semiotic and iconographic methods to decode symbols appearing in textile-based artworks. A purposive sampling method was used to select artists known for sustained textile engagement. Selected figures include El Anatsui, Peju Alatise, Nike Okundaye, Peju Layiwola, Ozioma Onuzulike, Eva Obodo, Zacheus Oloruntoba, and Olarenwaju Tejuosho. Their works were chosen primarily from the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art (YSMA), Lagos, Nigeria, supported by supplementary materials from exhibition catalogues and online archives. Data derived from two main sources: Primary sources which include visual study of artworks and direct or documented artist statements. And secondary sources which include published journals, catalogues, and previous scholarly analyses between 1976 and 2023. Where feasible, studio observation and interviews provided contextual clarification particularly about process, material handling, and intended symbolism. The analytical framework for this study comprises of formal analysis examining composition, texture, and arrangement, semiotic analysis

that decoded fabric patterns and stitching as signs denoting cultural, ecological, or spiritual meanings (following Bal, 1994; Chandler, 2017), iconological analysis that consider deeper cultural symbolism of motifs such as Adire spirals or woven grids and ekphrastic interpretation translated into visual sensations into narrative description to illuminate metaphorical readings.

Cloth as Material Experimentation

Observation of the selected works confirm that Nigerian artists employ varied techniques, stitching, dyeing, appliqué, weaving, assemblage, and installation to alter texture and evoke tactility. For instance, El Anatsui's monumental metallic tapestries resemble woven cloths but are assembled from aluminium bottle tops (see *Plate 1*). The material paradox; soft appearance, hard substance, serves as metaphor for transformation and resilience. Nike Okundaye on the other hand sustains Yoruba adire dyeing as both cultural continuity and female empowerment (*figure 2 above*) to illustrate indigo batik fabric compositions. Zacheus Oloruntoba used embroidery threads to depict a Yoruba drummer (*Figure 1 above*), showing early adaptation of textile craft within painting.



Plate 1: El Anatsui, Upcycled Bottle covers, Year of production unknown, Mixed Media.
Source: <https://inhabitat.com>. Sourced 13/04/2026

Cloth as Metaphor and Cultural Dialogue

Textile use extends beyond aesthetic manipulation into conceptual narrative. Peju Alatise's *Wrapture* employs fabrics wound around female forms to narrate restraint and liberation, metaphors for the gender experience and social change (*Figure 4*).

Ozioma Onuzulike's palm-kernel "textile" ceramics symbolise ecological transformation, linking environmental waste to material rebirth (*Plate 5*). Peju Layiwola's *Indigo Reimagined* references Benin craft legacies, employing lace and metallic fabric to interrogate memory and restitution (*Figure 6*) while Eva Obodo's jute installations reinterpret household weaving as monuments to community labour. Together these works reveal cloth as a semiotic field, an interface through which social meaning is continually woven and re-woven. From the analysis of these works, we see cloth embodying three overlapping functions. The visual semiotic mapping of textile meanings in the analysed works can be understood through three key functions. Indexical signs record the touch and labour of the artist, leaving visible traces of processes like folding, welding, or stitching, as seen in Anatsui's folded metal sheets. Iconic signs represent the texture and appearance of traditional textiles, such as Oloruntoba's thread embroidery, which mimics the look and feel of fabric. Symbolic signs encode broader ideas like identity, transformation, or protest, exemplified by Alatise's fabric-wrapped bodies, which convey complex cultural narratives. These semiotic functions highlight the multifaceted nature of textile

meanings in Nigerian art. Further findings indicate that artists' engagements with cloth mirror wider ecological and philosophical concerns. Upcycling and reuse of materials (as in Anatsui and Onuzulike) align artistic innovation with sustainability discourse. Similarly, the revival of indigenous dyeing, weaving, and embroidery underscores cultural resilience. Cloth's multivalence, its capacity to function simultaneously as narrative, texture, identity and metaphor positions it as central to understanding Nigeria's contemporary visual culture. The practice reconnects modern art production to everyday life, collapsing boundaries between craft and fine art and between personal and collective histories.

In Nigerian art, cloth emerges as a potent language of signs, with artists transforming fabric into communicative codes that weave together personal and collective narratives. Through the manipulation of fibre and colour, cloth transcends its utilitarian role, evolving into a powerful medium that enters broader philosophical and ecological debates. The permanence of textile engagement within formal art circles is evidenced by the YSMA collection, which institutionalises the significance of cloth in Nigerian art. Despite this, a gap in scholarship persists, as prior literature lacks a semiotic interpretation of these textile works. This study addresses this gap by applying semiotics, iconography, and ekphrasis, thereby enriching analytic frameworks for understanding Nigerian art and highlighting the complex meanings embedded in these textile creations.

Analysis of the selected artworks reveals that cloth simultaneously performs indexical, iconic, and symbolic functions within Nigerian contemporary art. As an indexical element, it records the physical traces of the artist's labour, the folds, seams, burns, or stitches that testify to the creative process. This dimension is visible in El Anatsui's monumental metal tapestries, where discarded bottle tops are folded, stitched, and linked through repetitive gestures that echo the rhythm of traditional weaving. Each link bears evidence of the artist's tactile engagement, transforming mass-produced waste into a repository of human touch. This process echoes Macuense (1955) who argue that art is non-alienated labour. What this means for artists is that labour is not experienced as an external entity rather it is instrumental to the process of creation. The artist recognises themselves in the work created, hence, the labourious process is not separated from the pleasure or imagination derived from the finished piece. In its iconic capacity, cloth imitates and references the visual texture and appearance of indigenous textile traditions. This form of representation allows artists to evoke the sensory familiarity of fabrics that have shaped Nigeria's social and cultural history. Zacheus Oloruntoba's embroidered depictions of Yoruba drummers exemplify this function. He uses thread and stitch to reproduce not only the look but also the rhythmic energy associated with traditional textiles, thereby bridging visual and cultural continuity. The symbolic function of cloth extends beyond its physical or imitative qualities to embody abstract and philosophical meanings. It becomes a metaphor for

identity, transformation, memory, and even resistance. Peju Alatise's fabric-wrapped female figures encapsulate this symbolic capacity, representing the layered experiences of womanhood within patriarchal and postcolonial frameworks. Her manipulation of cloth speaks of vulnerability and emancipation at once, expressing, through soft material, the strength of women's voices in contemporary Nigeria. Collectively, these roles confirm cloth as a multivalent sign system that carries aesthetic, cultural, and conceptual resonance within Nigerian artistic practice.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Cloth in Nigerian contemporary art has moved far beyond its initial utilitarian and decorative delineations. It now operates as a profound language of artistic expression through which the nation's visual culture negotiates history, identity, and modern realities. From the early textile experiments of artists such as Zacheus Oloruntoba to the monumental installations of El Anatsui and the conceptual fabric sculptures of Peju Alatise, cloth continues to evolve as both material and metaphor. Its transformation from craft to cognition, from texture to text, underscores the capacity of Nigerian artists to reinterpret traditional ideas through postmodern, global lenses while maintaining strong cultural roots. The findings from this study confirm that cloth in Nigerian art functions on multiple levels. First, it reflects continuity and transformation, artists draw inspiration from indigenous weaving, dyeing, and embroidery to project new meanings relevant to their

time. Second, it represents symbolic agency, artists use fibres, threads, and fabrics to articulate philosophies surrounding gender, ecology, and decolonisation. Third, it embodies aesthetic innovation, through recycling, assemblage, and large-scale installation, contemporary artists have redefined textile forms as sculptural and conceptual art. These revelations situate cloth not only within Nigeria's art history but also at the intersection of global sustainability and identity discourses.

On a theoretical level, the research contributes a semiotic and ekphrastic model for interpreting visual art in Nigeria. By reading textile-based works as systems of signs, this study decodes the metaphors embedded in material surfaces and reveals how visual signs translate into cultural meaning. This approach broadens traditional art-historical analysis, offering a textual framework through which artists' intentions and viewers' interpretations interact. It also highlights the centrality of tactile media in constructing Nigeria's contemporary art ecology. To further advance understanding and practice in Nigerian textile and fibre-based art, several interconnected recommendations merit attention. Nigerian universities and museums should develop dedicated archives and digital catalogues to record textile and fibre-based artworks, ensuring accessibility for art historians and future researchers. Art institutions ought to incorporate modules on textile semiotics, material culture, and sustainable practice into both studio and theory programmes, preserving indigenous knowledge while nurturing new conceptual directions.

Partnerships among local and international museums — such as the Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and global institutions — should curate exhibitions examining cloth as metaphor, facilitating meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. Alongside this, artists should be encouraged to explore recycled and natural fibres, aligning artistic inquiry with environmental awareness and circular-economy principles.

Finally, future scholarly work may expand semiotic analysis to digital and

performance contexts, tracing how artists employ textile symbolism in multimedia installations or wearable art. Cloth, as demonstrated in the works of selected Nigerian artists, represents an enduring metaphor for resilience, creativity, and identity. It is the fabric through which Nigeria's artistic imagination continues to weave narratives of past, present, and future. Recognising and analysing this dynamic medium is essential for any meaningful appreciation of Nigeria's contemporary art ecology.

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