

The Aesthetics Of Children's Schematic Art In Textile Design

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Abstract: This paper is based on an experiment of using rural and urban Nigerian children's drawing and painting as design motifs for surface decoration of fabrics. The classification of children at their schematic stage of creative development was adopted. Samples of children's works were copied and built into repeat patterns, maintaining the original colours. Design principles were used cautiously to retain the intrinsic effects of child art. Findings after experiments revealed that the attributes of transparency and the rigid use of colour which were experienced in both rural and urban settings had special effects on the derived designs. Male and female samples which were similar in themes in both settings gave interesting effects to the derived designs. It is interesting to discover how conventional motifs can indirectly be used by an adult artist from the point of view of children to create novelty in the area of designing for textiles.

I. INTRODUCTION

To be able to show the aesthetics of children's schematic art in textile design, one needs to combine both written and pictorial views of the subject as it is attempted in this paper. Since it is a paper based on a studio experimental research, it is pertinent to briefly mention that the data which were made up of the drawings and paintings of children between the ages of seven and nine years were collected in Akwa Ibom and Enugu states of Nigeria in 1993 and 1994, from both urban and rural areas and from both genders. Informal art workshop and individual assignment approaches were used to avoid panic situations where children are in a classroom with a cane-carrying teacher and an anxious researcher supervising their work. Library research and interviews were also done to know what has already been documented about schematic art and its applications.

The schematic age which is a developmental stage of childhood is under study, and in the context of this paper it is theoretically modeled after the arrangement of Lowenfeld and Britain (1975). It is possible to adapt the drawings, paintings and even three-dimensional works of children of other developmental stages for design but in this paper the main discourse deals with the schematic age bracket.

II. THE ART OF CHILDREN IN GENERAL

Child art is subject which has engaged researchers in the areas of child education, child psychology and other facets of study aimed at having the best of life for children which of course means the welfare of adults who naturally cater for them. At this point one needs to address the question of, who a child is, which answer has remained controversial. Dictionaries have proffered several similar definitions bordering around youthfulness. For example, Crowther (1995) defines the term 'child' as "a young person from birth to the age of full physical development". These are vague definitions considering that specific age limits are not mentioned. Nigel (1991) limits her statistics to those less than eighteen years of age while Lowenfeld and Britain (1975) limit theirs to maximum of seventeen. However, in the constitution of United States of America and Nigeria, adulthood begins at eighteen while in some countries it is extended to twenty-one. For the purpose of this paper the limit is twelve, for a reason which will be found later in this paper.

Children start their art with scribbles. The pre-school children and those in the kindergarten between the ages of two and four create their art which usually do not represent known objects and are often regarded as non-art. Korzenik (1991)

however argues to show that child art should be given its proper place in the field of art instead of being seen as something abnormal.

The pre-schematic group accommodates children between the ages of four and seven whose scribbles start to assume forms and the drawings make more sense to adult judgment. Gaitskell (1975) states “they manipulate materials in exploratory and random fashion”. Their use of colour is often compared to that of adult schizophrenics which is at random.

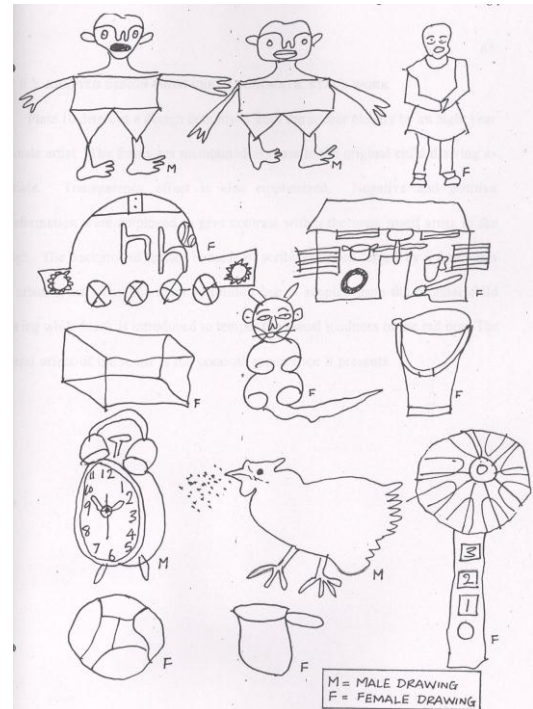
The schematic group which is the main subject of this paper exhibits drawings with very interesting attributes like transparency or x-ray effect and it is here that children realize that there is a relationship between colour and object.

The gang group who fall between the ages of nine and twelve make realistic but not naturalistic drawings and they tend to prefer group work. They strive to perfect their drawings with the understanding of the drawing techniques taught them in school. They may start to copy rather than create. According to Palmer (1970) “after the age of 11, the young adolescent often becomes self-conscious of his inability to reproduce accurately people and object ... he becomes frustrated, gradually losing interest and in some cases actively disliking any form of art”. Hoff (1982) is in support of this and it goes to uphold why this paper limits the age of children under study to twelve.

III. SCHEMATIC DRAWINGS AND ADAPTATION FOR TEXTILE DESIGN

Drawings of this age group of between seven and nine exhibit transparency or x-ray effects. The children here are not inhibited about showing the forms inside a building as if the cement or bricks walls were made of glass. A driver in a car is seen from head to toe regardless of the opaque nature of the car body. Jefferson (1959) encourages the freedom needed at this stage and writes that “when a child is free to choose his own subjects and to make his own associations, unusual combinations of forms sometimes result”. Gaitskell (1975) adds “Younger children go about their work in art with a fine, free abandon; they “try anything nice”, often regardless of the consequences.

Steller (1981) advises “its is bad to interfere with children’s creativity” and the writer of this paper shares in the advice thus most of the children’s works collected for the experiment were done with minimal supervision. However, Udosen (1993) cautions that though freedom should be given to children to create, there should be a certain level of guidance if not the product may fail to be art. At the schematic stage also, the child does what some authorities in child art call base line drawings. Most of the forms in a scenery are lined up on the same plane without perspective. An example is the work of Ezinne Ibe, an eight year old in 1993. The seats inside a car are seen completely from outside (illus. 1), second line from the top.



Illus. 1 Urban schematic stage drawing forms (Copied by the author for clarity)

The transparency effect is also found to be excellent for repeating designs. An urban example is a drawing and painting of soccer players by eight year old Chimezie Ekere in 1998. The human forms are realistic but the proportions and perspective are still lacking. There is also absence of fingers and ears. An attempt at interviewing the young artist about his creation was almost counter productive. The field assistant attached to the particular workshop analyzed the work and explained that perhaps since hands usually cause foul play, the young artist must have seen fingers as undesirable and ears to him are not seen as vital to the game. The abnormal hair on one of the players reflect the advent of dread-locked Rastafarians in soccer, see plate 1.



Plate 1: Chimezie Ekere’s painting of soccer players. 1993



Plate 2: Adaptation of a child's schematic drawing for textile design. Courtesy: The author, 1995.

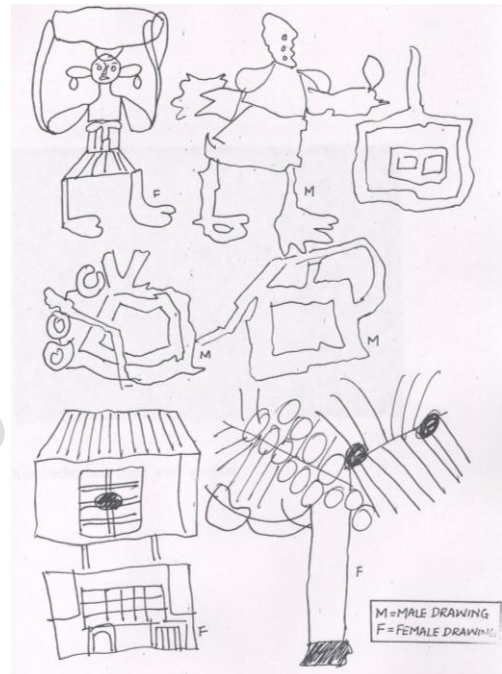
Jefferson (1959) explains the normalcy in the behaviour exhibited by Chimezie at the interview by writing that "Although children often find difficulty in verbally describing or explaining their abstract art, they create it freely and confidently if they their teacher accepts and appreciates it". Sheinak (1981) adds that "children draw what they feel or think is important not what actually exists.

Samples of rural schematic work are the paintings of a vehicle, and a house by Ekaette Nkere, a 7 year old girl in Ikot Akpan Obong, Ibiono Ibom local government area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria as at 1993. The painting of 'an army man' by a different child artist 9 year old Ndianabasi Unaowo from the same village is sandwiched between Ekaette's works for the purpose of comparison of attributes, see plate 3. These drawings also show the transparency or x-ray effect common among both rural and urban artists of the schematic group. Themes of work here are not necessarily rural. Children in this group are equally excited about the advent of modern buildings, cars and military persons, which are more common in urban areas. However, if themes are not selected for them, the rural child artist equally attends to rural-reflecting themes.

The use of colour in the earlier part of schematic works does not show the true colours of the object but the upper (borderline) paintings of the children in the schematic group reflect the actual colours observed by the children.



Plate 3: Rural schematic work samples (Original children's work)



Illus. 2: Rural schematic drawing forms (copied by the writer for clarity)

The researcher used form overlapping and juxtaposition techniques to create a unit of design which became a bit more interesting because of the negative and positive renditions of the some components of the unit in terms of form and colour. Base line effect which is an attribute of the schematic group was employed thus the design was made to reflect a linear arrangement. All the colours used were adapted from the use of colour of one of the children. Toning was however used to relate the hues to one another for colour balance. The design of a bib cloth just like that of the urban schematic example reflects a comical effect. See plate 4.



Plate 4: Bib cloth design created from schematic drawings. Courtesy: the author, 1995.

Chimezie's 'soccer players' in (fig. 1) were adapted for the repeating design in (plate 2). An important attribute synthesized from this group is repetition of schema. The children in this group have a habit of repeating a particular object which shows rhythm, an element desirable in designing for textiles.

IV. USE OF COLOUR AT THE SCHEMATIC AGE AND ITS ADAPTATION FOR TEXTILE DESIGN

It is at this stage of development that most children realize that there is a relationship between colour and objects. The child realizes that leaves are green and the sky is blue and in his paintings he becomes rigid being that the sky must be blue even if it is raining. Besides, the tones of the hues are not taken into consideration. This stage of the child's use of colour is particularly interesting in relationship to design. What the child may see as a mistake in the use of a medium like water colour may give good inspiration and motifs for design by adults. At the schematic age of a child, the freshness and directness in self expression with colour appear to be what is required in the art of adults currently.

The writer has discovered that while adult designers consciously strive to create rhythm and manipulate colours in patterns, the child at this stage does it freely and spontaneously. Lowenfeld and Britain (1975) confirm this and state that "he paints spontaneously and the repetition of form and schemata is done unconsciously". Another writer, Steller (1981) opines that "adults point to children's creativity because most children produce art work that looks creative; that is, fresh and imaginative". The fresh, imaginative and flat colours with the inherent rhythm were adapted for the design of the soccer players in plate 2.

V. FINDINGS AFTER FIELD WORK AND STUDIO EXPERIMENTS

The general findings arrived at after assessing and trying out adaptations of the schematic group drawings and painting revealed that while majority of those in the rural areas worked on rural themes, those of the urban areas worked more on urban themes but basically, the attributes of transparency and the rigid use of colour cut across both settings. It is also discovered that while male preferred to represent male chores, female preferred female chores but the basic manifestation in terms of techniques remain the same.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is a thing of interest to see how conventional motifs can indirectly be used by adult artists from the point of view of children to create novelty in the area of designing for textiles and it is the writer's belief that this attempt may help open up new grounds for further research into fresh sources of designs motifs for textiles and other related fields.

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