

Conceptualization of ceramic form and surface in unity: Nsibidi cultural preservation in Nigeria.

By

Elizabeth Esege

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ABSTRACT

Traditional values are precious because they reflect who we are and how we live our lives. It is important to accept and respect these values. Traditionally, the sustainability of the values of the Nsibidi symbols cannot be expunged. These symbols are numerous and were institutionalized and used as a form of communication with the people of Ejagham, in the Efik Ibibio Southeast region of Nigeria.

‘African traditional society is anchored on the facts that institutions, beliefs, social order, norms and several practices which of a truth, must of necessity be given foundational rites of passage. This acknowledgement of African tradition is usually through visual interpretation, which may reflect in several forms of art, most often the interpretations are engaged to demonstrate and highlight social demeanour and decorum’ (Nsentip, 2006, p.1).

Pottery Art is a long-standing tradition in Nigeria and was popular from 100 B.C. It was found on the archaeological site of Iwo Eleru, in Ondo State of Nigeria and this terracotta artifacts dated from A.D. 800 which were found at Ile Ife Osun state of Nigeria (Fowewe, 2004, p.12). Today Suleja, Abuja and Ilorin states are considered important centres of traditional pottery, although the craft is practiced throughout the country.

Archaeologists and scholars in the field of ceramics are agreed that, long before the evolution of letters, pottery forms were used to illustrate signs, symbols and abstracted images and also as means of communication. In Nigeria and throughout Africa, indigenous symbols are an important way to communicate cultural ideas and beliefs

This study has conceptualised Nsibidi symbols as surface expression of thoughts and ideas in a narrative manner for its cultural preservation. The beauty of Nsibidi radiates creative rays packed in forms and symbols, such that it has captivated and inspired a new form into existence. Therefore, the study focuses on highlighting this diversified uniqueness of Nsibidi symbols into creating new ceramic form.

Following a bricolage methodological approach to qualitative inquiries, the research has engaged a contextual review approach to investigate the historical development of ceramic form and surface expression and identifies through case studies artists who

have used Nsibidi symbols in their contemporary art practice, in order to position the research within the field.

Theories surrounding forms and surfaces in ceramics have been considered to develop a perspective for this research. A practice-based methodology was employed to develop a new ceramic form and surface expression with Nsibidi symbols that contribute to Nsibidi cultural preservation.

Furthermore, the research contributes a body of ceramic objects, which explores the application of Nsibidi cultural symbols with the combination of narrative and interpretation of Nsibidi symbols into its contemporary ceramics practice.

Through the use of durable Western materials (stoneware, porcelain, paper clay), used for creative exploration, Nsibidi symbols can be preserved in the museum and galleries for international awareness. For Western audiences, this research offers an example of how Nigerian cultural symbols have been incorporated into contemporary clay art; and knowledge and meaning of Nsibidi documented. This study presents a model of research by recording the processes that other researchers can follow, in order to preserve their cultural heritage.

DEDICATION

This Research is dedicated to my only sister, the late Susan Eni Esege.

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Finally, I would like to thank CRUTECH and my friends, indeed your show of love is appreciated.

DECLARATION

I, Elizabeth Esege, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is mine. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research project's starting point, outlines the research background and demonstrates the potential significance of conceptualizing a new ceramic form and Nsibidi symbols as surface expression for cultural preservation. It also discusses research problems, aims and objectives and provides a brief summary of the written thesis. An overview of the methodology and methods presents the approach taken in practice.

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Form is a generic term. It cuts across different disciplines, such as art, literature, botany, geology and many more. However, the research interprets form as a volumetric creative unique aesthetic clay piece, while surface-decoration is the embellishment on form-surface. Both elements are perceived as two uniform concepts, which together make up ceramics. The Nsibidi symbol is an ancient form of communication that does not correspond to any spoken language; rather the script and symbols refer to abstract concepts, actions and things and facilitate communication among people speaking different languages.

Nigerian art and culture have traditionally served a social or religious purpose and did not exist for the sake of aesthetic art. For example, dance was used to teach or to fulfil some ritualistic goal. The sculptures were used in blessings, in healing rituals or to prevent bad luck. Not to forget the Nsibidi symbols which was a system of symbolic writing indigenous people of the East and Southern parts of Nigeria. However, Due to the advent of colonialism both in the 19th and 20th century, Nigerian Art became and is still being less oriented to these particular purposes. To a large extent, Nigerians have abandoned these forms of Art because they embraced the way of life of their colonial masters and as such these art forms no longer serve the usual purposes (Ngumah, 2010, p.16).

The natives of Nigeria have suffered a massive culture and identity loss, as colonialism brought and imposed its' culture, language, behaviour, beliefs, and other ways of life on Nigerians. This then led to the natives abandoning some of their customs and cultural practices in favour of those brought by their colonizers. For most natives, though, the conformity to the new way of life was more out of fear of the colonialists than a belief in their ways of life (Edem, and Gadzama, 2019, p.8). Therefore, the research created a body of ceramic objects which explores the application of Nsibidi cultural symbols with the combination of narrative and interpretation of cultural symbols into its contemporary ceramics practice for the preservation of Nsibidi because clay is a longevity material when fired.

Thus, after the 46 years of colonization, the natives lost significant parts of their culture and identity, which were never fully regained even after the country attained independence from colonial rule. One of such art and culture specifically affected by colonialism is the Nsibidi art of symbolic writing which was once the only form of written communication for expression, record keeping, and learning amongst those in southern Nigerian where this form of writing was replaced with English language for ease of writing and communication between the locals and the colonial masters (Kalu 1980 p.41). The research offers a cross-cultural artifact which are intended to be preserved in art galleries and museums for international awareness as both places preserve and hold historical art objects, which attract tourists to visit.

Art forms are becoming a continuum for preserving the vast nature of traditional cultures as time progresses; transformations take place in every field. There are certain things which should not be forgotten with the progress of time. Some of those cultural forms are like our symbols, which were literally designed to serve as a means of identity and at one time a means of communication (Kalu 1980 p.43). The aim of this study is to preserve the ancient Nsibidi symbols, which have become an inspiration for modern art forms, but which are on the verge of vanishing.

Exploring the Nsibidi symbols in my ceramic practices will help preserve them with the cross-generational changes in cultural practices Nigeria precisely, where Christianity is dominant, one way to help preserve our cultural values lies in the need to develop a practical approach through ceramic production of infusing the Nsibidi symbols, as they will absolutely become a compass to rely on in the face of the present – where the past is out of the window. However, engaging some ceramic production methods,

such as the coiling method, slab and pinching techniques, with the Nsibidi symbols will re-engage Nsibidi from a more populist pedestal to complement what has been done in the fields of painting and textiles. By this approach, it will return Nsibidi to the people, to the centre, where it originally belonged; and reaffirm it once more as a cultural resource that can be accessed (Ikwuemesi, 2016).

This research deals with the conceptualization of new forms and Nsibidi symbols as surface expression for Nsibidi cultural preservation in Nigeria. As a way of artistic expression through studio practice, the inspiration came from a series of experimental drawing and ceramic artworks completed in the previous year (2018) (see Figs 1 & 2). Since developing new ceramic form which will portray Nsibidi symbols for cultural preservation was the subject, Nsibidi lines became an inspiration; and technically combining and assembling similar lines to fashion creative form has remained an essential component of my studio practice.

Using this acquired experience from the experimental drawing as a platform to create new ceramic forms will serve as a model for others, who will extend their own creative potential of making new forms from an existing object; in addition to expanding my own practice, in order to convey the potential creative worth of working with cultural symbols and Western materials. Western materials in this research are referred to different clay bodies the researcher found in the UK, that are different from the earthen ware clay which she has been using in Nigeria for ceramics exploration. These Western materials include stoneware, porcelain, paper clay.

My early works portray Nsibidi moral values and meaning held strong by the people of Cross River State, Nigeria, where the symbols originated.

The research goal, however, has been to move away from Nsibidi moral values to sketches and drawings to develop new ceramic forms, using ceramics techniques with different types of materials (clay) enveloped with ideas and concept. It has been clear to me as a result of my studio experience and guidance from both my supervisory teams to observe a few postgraduate students exploring cultural symbols in their practice. This has been observed mainly in doctoral theses completed using glass as the creative medium and submitted to the University of Sunderland.

In fact, many of the researchers felt that it is a near-impossible task for cultural symbols to be inculcated into art practices for the promotion and awareness of cultural heritage. Therefore, to develop conceptualized forms and Nsibidi symbols as surface expression in my practice for Nsibidi cultural preservation in Nigeria has become my motivation.

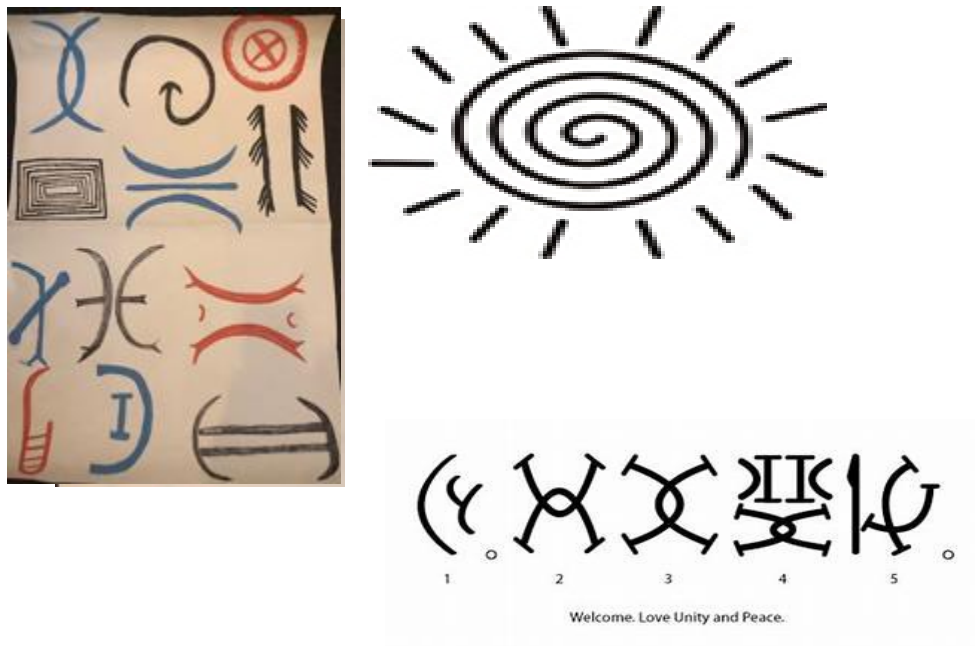


Figure 1: Series of experimental drawings of Nsibidi
Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2018

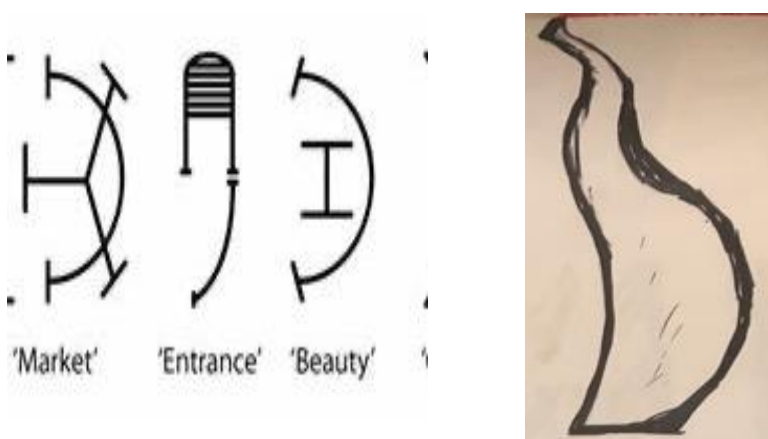


Figure 2: Series of experimental drawings of Nsibidi
Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2018

1.2 EXISTING KNOWLEDGE IN THE RESEARCH FIELD

The literature review establishes a new research problem, and the works surveyed below were chosen as studies that investigate at least one aspect or element of this research, whilst also providing a relevant example of studio-based explorations in ceramic practice.

Each of these examples served as a model for and validation of the value of this research within the field of art practice

The studio-based doctoral research undertaken by Jungwon Park at the University of Sunderland (2015) titled *Hybrid Expression: Expressing Space through the Integration of East and West by creating Ceramic Artwork*, explores how hybrid cultural concepts might be used to express space in contemporary ceramics. The study tends to render this research relevant from the perspective of surface expression, because the Nsibidi symbol is equally a hybrid cultural expression; and, in a similar way, the research explores Nsibidi as surface decoration in my contemporary ceramic practices. The research further adapted techniques such as decal, relief and incised surface treatment as explored in this research for Nsibidi surface expression (see Chapter 5).

Another studio-based PhD project, completed at the University of Sunderland by Kathleen Moroney (2017) and titled *Stillness in Motion: An Interdisciplinary Study of Movement in Time and Space through ceramics and Dance*, is a physical exploration of stillness as a movement in time and space, through her personal participation in selected areas of dance practice and ceramics.

The interest of Moroney's study lies in the studio practices; this research uses the same ceramics practice, as a container that embodied two cultural concepts of expression (UK and Nigeria) in a unified ceramic piece, showcasing Nigerian cultural heritage for preservation purposes, as stated in section 5.1. The study accommodates the same multi-method approach of enquiry to achieve its research aims, which include studio practice, reflective methods, contextual methods, case studies,

intentionality as a method and post-colonial theory (see research methods Chapter 1, sec 1.8).

Vessels have been embellished in all ceramic-making cultures from Neolithic time to the present day; and many ceramicists have explored this subject in great detail. *The Ceramic Surface* (2002) by Matthias Ostermann presents an exploration of the ceramic surface through an examination of the works of 200 ceramicists from around the world, with contemporary techniques and approaches. The book demonstrates a great variety of procedures employed to treat the ceramic surface in the final decade of the twentieth century. Matthias focuses on the ceramic surface in the framework of the vase and platter, which contains non-functional, metaphoric, narrative, and sculptural elements. This study is inspired by the exploration and surface expression by the works of the 200 ceramicists portrayed in this book, and the book is therefore considered relevant to this research study.

Surface, Glaze and Form (2012) by Anderson Turner presents pottery techniques which cover three of the most critical aspects of the ceramic process. The thirty artists presented in this book discuss the techniques they used to decorate and glaze their ceramics works. All the different types of forming methods, from hand building to slip casting are illustrated step- by-step in detail, with surface techniques that cover a wide range of decorative techniques. This researcher considers the book important, as it provides ideas and techniques that kept me motivated, because every new technique learnt has altered the way I currently create my ceramic works and, to me, is a whole different adventure.

Within the field of glass, there is no shortage of PhD projects; those of interest to this study were studio-based with emphasis on the use of a cultural symbol. Jianyong Guo (2016) did his PhD in the field of glass calligraphy art; his thesis was titled '*Inside Painting*', as *Used for Chinese Snuff Bottles, Suggested as A New Model for Contemporary Glass Art*. His research is an exploration of Chinese traditional symbol inside painting through the creation of contemporary glass artworks. The PhD was inspired by calligraphy as Chinese cultural symbol, and he used hot glass and casting as a tool for writing calligraphy and making glass. Another PhD study by Ayako Tani (2013) is titled *Multi-dimensional Line-drawing With Glass Though a Development of Lampworking*. Her research involved the development of calligraphy as a conception of calligraphy lampworking. Both Tani and Guo have adapted Chinese calligraphy,

which is a traditional symbol, in their contemporary glass practice as a means of expressing their cultural value.

This study considers Tani and Guo relevant, as both artists have a great impact, because they have used contemporary material (glass) to enlighten their native cultural symbol (Chinese calligraphy); and these serve as an inspiration to the study because the research uses Nsibidi native symbols as a means of communicating my cultural heritage through the medium of clay for cultural preservation in Nigeria.

The PhD thesis by Kevin Hales (2015) at Ohio University, titled *The moving Finger: A Rhetorical, Grammatological and Afrinographic Exploration of Nsibidi in Nigeria and Cameroon*, used ethnography study to present an inside view of Nsibidi origin and meaning. Hales explored Nsibidi utilizing Afrinography as a method of study. His research discusses how communication studies scholarship can integrate unknown Nsibidi rhetorical and grammatological potentials.

Umanna Nnochiri's (2017) PhD, entitled *Developing Motifs from Ikom Monoliths and Nsibidi for Carnival Calabar Costumes*, explores monoliths and Nsibidi cultural symbols as her major inspiration to create designs in her contemporary textile studio practice: Nnochiri textile cloth, literally covered in a series of monoliths, which has the old Nsibidi symbols depicting information about life, success and knowledge, thus expressing inner self. These textile cloths are usually worn during the most special ceremonies and the Calabar carnival. Each of the symbols plays an important role in the history and culture of Nigeria.

A book entitled *Connecting Linea Across Space and Time* by Victor Ekpuk (2018), captures twelve full essays about Ekpuk. He is a world-renowned artist, who specializes in cryptic writings, archaic signs and Nsibidi symbols. His messages, encoded in Nsibidi and other symbols and signs, take form in paintings, sketches, cartoons and murals. Twelve excellent authors reflect on the background, creativity, and the interpretations of his symbolic messages. Hales's (2015) ethnography study presents an inside view of Nsibidi meaning which is an important part of this research and Nnochiri (2017); while the Ekpuk (2018) work seems to share similarities with this study, although the difference lies in the style and material, which reveal how important they are to the study.

A thorough search was undertaken regarding the context of the study, in order to determine what research has been done or is being undertaken in these areas.

Regarding the questions and aims defined in the research, there are no other projects dealing with the same issues, and – as such – there is a gap in the literature.

With the existing PhDs. and books stated above, the researcher has utilised the findings as a guideline in achieving the aims of the studio-based research.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Nsibidi symbols have been researched by scholars and used by contemporary studio artists; however, there is a lack of contemporary representation of Nsibidi symbols in ceramics practice for cultural preservation.

Conceptualized forms and Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration are the coming together of two unique elements lacking in unity of expression, whilst the surface of a ceramic piece presents itself for visual pleasure/imagery, the conceptualized form is often articulated around purpose.

One observes that surface exploration is sometimes more than just ornamental: it is often employed as symbolism and as a means of alternative for communication. Surface expression in ancient ceramics creates a window on to the cultures and habits of past civilizations' history. Surface decoration is independent of its host form; worse still; it sometimes compromises integrity of the form by way of visual expression, thus taking the viewer's attention away from the object itself. Surface decoration often receives more attention for its pictorial representation than the pots themselves, something which is also seen on Greek ceramic pots. An example is the Attic Greek red-figure painting on ceramic pieces, one of the most important features of the figural Greek style developed in Athens around 520 BC (Bish 2009, p.46).

The mere fact that one element can be isolated visually for aesthetic reasons is clear evidence of lack of integration. It also means the two concepts lack unified expression. The research therefore asks: can conceptualized ceramic forms be created with Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration and still be appreciated just for what they are? Of course, yes, but at what cost? What would have been the consequences if all the pottery forms known in the history of ceramics were devoid of all visual elements which endowed meaning to them? The response is that the windows through which art

historians, research scholars and archaeologists have learned about beliefs, habits and practices of ancient civilizations would not have been possible.

Hence, most of the information on ancient societies derived from embellished ceramic surfaces would probably have been lost forever. Furthermore, their readings would have been delayed and lost. The study appreciates the fact that doctoral research in ceramics art in the UK is in its dominant stage, compared to Nigeria which is still in its embryonic stage. Previous research, including Xue (2009), Guo (2016) and Donghai (2013), adapted Chinese calligraphy, which is a traditional symbol in their contemporary glass practice, as a means of expressing/preserving their cultural value. Greek pottery has been using surface expression to imitate pattern and movement in ceramics art; and this research finds it parallel to the study.

In the first attempt at historicity in Nigeria, Onuzulike (2005) researched into Nigerian ceramicists Igwillo and Echeta's creative style of ceramic wares. Echeta (2011) researched the creative development of the ceramic art practice of Umunna, a Nigerian potter. Both researchers examined the intersections between the stylistic life and creative works developed by these Nigerian contemporary ceramicists. As important as these efforts are, none addressed the concerns of this current study, exploring Nsibidi symbols as surface expression on a new ceramic form. Literature reviewed on selected contemporary clay artists reveals the absence of effort in this direction. Nnochiri (2017), whose works seem to share relative similarities with this research, was found to be different. The differences revolved around materials and style, as well as subject. Nnochiri experimented with the Nsibidi symbols in relation to textile production of apparel involving the tie-dye technique.

This therefore inspired the conceptualization of the Nsibidi symbols as ideographs embedded with philosophical meanings through the exploration of forms and surface in unity with ceramics. Nsibidi symbols are unique, and their cultural pride and resource are being lost/fading away (Carlson, 2003, p.22). If nothing is done to further preserve these symbols for posterity, future generations will have no idea even of the existence of such significant cultural symbols.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have artists engaged the use of forms, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols in their Art/Craft practice?
2. How can new ceramic forms and symbols contribute to Nsibidi cultural preservation?
3. What ceramics production methods or creative techniques and/or applications can be used for the conceptualization of forms which serve as a vehicle for Nsibidi cultural preservation?
4. How might Nsibidi traditional symbols be integrated into Western materials and practice?

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this study is to unify form and surface for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural symbols in Nigeria through ceramics practice. To this end the aims are the following:

1. To review the history and development of ceramics forms, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols used in contemporary art practice.
2. To conceptualize ceramic forms and Nsibidi symbols as surface expression for Nsibidi cultural preservation.
3. To determine the ceramics production method, creative techniques and application in my ceramics practice for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural symbols.
4. To develop clay work that demonstrates Western concept/ideas, materials, and techniques for enhancement of Nsibidi cultural heritage.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to conceptualise a new ceramic form and surface expression with Nsibidi symbols for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural heritage in Nigeria. The emphasis of the investigation on the theoretical path is to review the history and development of ceramic forms, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols used in contemporary art practices; while on the path of practice, it is to develop a new ceramic form inspired by Nsibidi symbols and surface expression with Nsibidi symbols. The focus of this new ceramic form is to portray Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration for cultural preservation. The symbols should be clearly identifiable, with a written document to provide insight and more explanation of Nsibidi symbols.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a set of practices and principles employed in a specific order or discipline, (Gray and Malins, 2004, p.17.) Research methodologies in art and design have a relatively shorter history when compared to other fields of study (Allson, 1992.). In a situation where there is a lack of appropriate procedures and methodologies in Art and Design, a supplementary method exists, which is established in science and social science (Gray and Malins ,1993 p.3). 'Various existing methodologies in art and design research are classified in five forms, which are: Action Research, Soft System, Naturalistic Inquiry, the Bricoleur and Inquiry by Design' (Gray and Malins, 2004, p.74). A survey of the research methodology literature helps in the identification of relevant research procedures. A variety of methodological techniques were explored, revealing methods and how scholars within the discipline of Art and Design have structured their research. This research project has been conceived from the start as a series of findings based on studio practice. and this has involved experimental learning and reflective practice (Kolb 1984, p.41).

The most important influence in the early stage of selecting a suitable research method which supports and achieves the research objectives – as encouraged by Gray and Malin for students – is to actively explore the research process in relation to practice and the environment of the research; this will be done from a constructivist perspective, with an emphasis on experiential learning (Gray and Malins 2004). The practice-based methodological framework used to achieve the aims and objectives of this study is a Bricolage methodological approach to qualitative inquiry, which involves multi-methods identified by Gray and Malins.

The employment of this 'Bricolage' methodological approach provides a reliable framework through conceptualization, articulation, reflection, manipulation, presentation, classification and analysis of ideas on the practice-based research.

Several PhD theses have been read, but Park (2015) and Moroney (2017) have used multi-methods in their research and, through critical reading and understanding of their methods, the researcher has adapted their methods in this study.

1.8 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHOD USED

Studio practice is the creative act of making seen as a research method, through which the purposeful manipulation of material leads to an object that produces meaning and understanding through creation. The tests and artworks produced demonstrate the relevance of studio practice in this research. Since all the works created were produced with different clay, this research applied different ceramic production techniques, in order to achieve the conceptualized new ceramic form with Nsibidi as a surface expression.

The study focused on the diversified uniqueness of Nsibidi similar lines as an inspiration towards the realization of the new ceramics form for the preservation of Nsibidi. The study basically started with a sketch, developed into experimental drawing (see Figs. 37 & 38) which was employed in earthenware clay, stoneware clay and paper clay, by using pinching, coiling and slab methods to achieve the new ceramic forms which serve as the instrument for Nsibidi to be preserved (see Chapter 5).

The reflective method is a practice that has been used to provide a more in-depth knowledge of the creative process; and this is carried out in all aspects of the research, in idea development and creation of works both successful and (sometimes) less successful. This is achieved through personal reflection and peer review. Specific creative methods used in the reflective practice include:

1. Sketching and drawing,
2. Gathering and collection of information through photography and writing; material testing through studio-based experiment (oxides, glazes, decal firing); testing using variety of techniques (pinching, coiling, slab methods,).
3. Evaluation and critical analysis of results (consultation with supervisory team and peers).

These methods also help in the design process of the Nsibidi symbol in a unified form for easy identification by viewers for the preservation purposes to be achieved. The decision that takes place during creative processes is a reflection in action, where direct observation relies on the continuous progression of the generated pieces (Elkins 2009, p.115). The process of ceramic production begins with the engagement of thoughts and ideas, which eventually result in form. In most cases, particularly when engaging with traditional motifs or symbols, a sketch, photographs and direct observation are required, before exploring with creative hands. The decision of the final form relies on the emotion attached thereto. The engagement of the Nsibidi symbols in my ceramic practice resulted when I discovered the philosophical meaning and human moral values imbedded in Nsibidi symbols. My relationship with selected Nsibidi symbols influenced my marital life positively and the need to research and preserve Nsibidi symbols through my ceramic pieces became relevant. 'Our traditional values are fast eroding, according to Chinua Achebe in *Things fall apart*, the Africans are more or less moving in vicious circles, the centre can no longer hold' (Nsenti, 2006, p.26) (See Chapter 5.)

The intentionality method has been applied to form a narrative expression which portrays Nsibidi moral values and meaning. Intentionality is a term adopted by Edmund Husserl with philosophical models describing the human capacity to be self-conscious (Applebaum, 2014, p.19). To state that a thought is purposeful is to indicate that it intends, has goals or is focused on a certain object. Thus, intentionality is the 'aboutness' of a mental idea, the relationship through which a psychological state relates to an intended goal (Dale 2004, p.130). Applebaum (2014) maintained that intentionality is the core of every act of consciousness we perform; and every experience that we have is intentional. Nsibidi symbols are ideographs used in the pre-colonial Ejagham-Efik and Arochukwu areas, South-South region of Nigeria. They are often considered a means of communication among the Ekpe society. As such, the major focus of this research is to use Nsibidi symbols and form for surface expression on ceramic pieces; and equally create a narrative of my experiences with the research artworks, which will further preserve and protect the cultural symbols with their traditional beliefs. Intentional description is often structured with and rooted with the self-consciousness of the mind or within a practice (Siewert, 2021). The researcher intentionally composed Nsibidi symbols to form a narrative story, which has been exhibited in the experimental drawing and surface expressional language seen on the new ceramic forms, with a story line based on the researcher's life experiences. The Nsibidi symbols are purposefully used as they symbolically communicate knowledge, feelings and human moral values. The selected symbols were used stylistically in such a way that they link together to tell a single story. Therefore, the composition of the Nsibidi symbols as portrayed on the artworks was a deliberate attempt to place on record the importance of the Nsibidi symbols and to express it artistically, not only to Africans, but to the world at large.

Post-Colonial Theory and Practice has been engaged as it builds upon the existing ceramic cultures from Neolithic time to the present day; and many ceramicists have explored this subject in detail. According to Udeani (2014), the interaction of identity and styles in modern Nigerian art is considered as rooted in spontaneous synthesis. Most current Nigerian artists draw influence from past traditions. This demonstrates that it is possible to remain in the mainstream of modern life, while also preserving one's identity and tradition.

However, symbols are representations of objects that are abstract in nature. The usage of symbols and images predates the establishment of formal schooling, which was passed down from generation to generation. These symbols and images were shared more for leisure than for production, since they were employed as body ornamentation and murals. Everyone possessed the potential to be creative, as well as the ability to appreciate art (Udeani, 2014). Nsibidi symbols, for example, are packed with deep philosophical connotations, as stated in section 2.7.

Recent ceramic studio practices of contemporary ceramicists such as Ozioma Onuzulike, Chris Echeta and Levi Yakubu have excluded the uses of signs and symbols such as the famous Nsibidi symbols, which have been a subject in contemporary art practices.

Okunna (2012) maintained that Ladi Kwali's work is essential to telling the story of the creation of modern ceramics practice in Nigeria. Ladi Kwali was one of Michael's Cardew's trainees at the Abuja Pottery training centre in Nigeria in the year 1954 (see section 2.6).

Ladi Kwali carved a niche for herself through her contributions in the whole process of modern ceramics development in Nigeria. She lived through two distinct domains in her art practice: the traditional, cultural environment where she was discovered, and the modern: she transitioned from tradition to modernity. The surface embellishment of Ladi Kwali's traditional pottery was distinctive (see Fig 11, section 2.6). Her clay vases were distinguished by their carved animal forms and ornamentation. She preferred, as her figural motifs, scorpions, lizards, crocodiles, snakes, chameleons, birds and fish; although her pots were decorated with geometric, linear patterns (Okunna, 2012, n.p).

Indigenous and modern techniques of Nigerian pottery cannot be examined in isolation from the techniques that are involved, which in most cases are tied to the uniqueness of the ceramic forms. This research considers this post-colonial practice relevant, because it builds upon the existing works of post-colonial practice, such as that of Ladi Kwali, whose works are parallel to my own practice in terms of surface pattern, which was influenced by her traditional and cultural environment; and inspirational tools, which were Ladi's strong features in pottery practice.

This research has further adapted similar techniques to the surface embellishing of Ladi Kwali: traditional pottery as explored in her works, to create an African appearance, which portrays a background of the origin of Nsibidi symbols for further cultural preservation. (See Chapter 3).

Case studies were adopted for this research to review how contemporary artists have engaged the use of ceramics form and Nsibidi symbols in their Art and/or Craft practice. This was carried out in relation to aim 1 of this research (historical review). The researcher deems it crucial to identify at this point the contemporary experienced clay artist Magdalene Odundo, whose practice has demonstrated creation of asymmetrical forms which are burnished rather than glazed. Magdalene Odundo is a Kenyan-born artist based in the UK. Odundo's ceramic artifacts are hand-built pieces achieved with coiling techniques. The hand-built pieces are burnished and covered with slip, which has resonances to traditional African pottery (see section 4.3, Figs. 28 and 29). To realize the objective of this research, the researcher has also identified Victor Ekpuk, a Nigerian-born artist based in Washington, D.C., whose painting has used Nsibidi to convey ideas, to form a personal style of mark making. These case studies aid the positioning of the research in the contemporary field of practice. (see section 4.5).

A contextual method is relevant, as a contextual review helps to connect with other important related research, in order to develop a specific space into which you might contribute. (Gray and Malins 2004, p.36).

At the start of the research, the researcher was paired with a library buddy at the University of Sunderland. The librarian assisted with a systematic search method, to generate keywords to search for books, articles and journals related the research topic. Articles and books were sorted from Google Scholar (an internet search engine) and the university's multiple databases, such as WILEY, ELSEVIER, EBSCO, JSTOR and SAGE. The internet has played a vital role in the literature search for this study, fetching information on different cultures' practices, as it relates to the study for reference purposes.

A literature survey was carried out on the theories and concepts of forms, history and development of ceramics form, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols used in contemporary art practice, which helped to inform my practice.

The literatures were applied to examine the archaeological records, ethnographic and Afronographic written records and visual culture, which include objects and photographs, to inquire into the preservation of culture through Art practice (see chapters 2 and 3).

1.9 SUMMARY OF THESIS

To achieve these objectives of the research, this thesis is divided into six chapters, each structured to address a specific topic and issues. It is hoped that the chapters will explore and establish the possible ways of conceptualizing forms and using Nsibidi symbols as surface expression for cultural preservation. The content of the different chapters is presented below:

Chapter 1 (this chapter) describes the starting point for this research, by introducing the research background, the problem statement and defining aims, objectives and the methodological approach through which to execute this research.

Chapter 2 covers a broad review of the theoretical and conceptual framework, as well as perspectives on theories of form. It also relates to the first study goal, which is to examine the history and development of ceramics form, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols in contemporary art practice, to help define and structure the research path.

Chapter 3 focuses on cultural preservation through art, as well as possible cultural preservation approaches. Because of the unique nature of the research, which takes place in the UK and includes Nigerian cultural symbols, it also investigates globalisation and how it has impacted on cultural preservation.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed case study of Magdalene Odundo, exploration of ceramic form practice and Victor Ekpuk's aesthetic paintings with Nsibidi and its philosophical meaning of creating his own unique language of abstraction that speaks a global hybrid language.

Chapter 5 presents the studio practice, which creates a body of ceramic artworks that demonstrate and articulate the possible ways of preserving Nsibidi cultural symbols. The studio-based practice is structured in terms of the making of artworks; the documentation; and evaluation.

Chapter 6 summarises the research findings and discusses the contribution of this research to knowledge. Possible areas for further research have been identified and this is followed by the concluding remarks of the current study.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

This chapter discusses the general overview of the theoretical and conceptual framework, which addresses views with regards to theories and concepts of form. It also relates to the first research aim: to review the history and development of ceramics form, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols used in contemporary art practice, so as to assist with defining and giving focus to the research path.

The contextual review is divided into four sections: the theoretical/conceptual framework; literature of early history and development of ceramics form and ceramic surfaces; literature related to history and development of Nigeria Art and ceramic; and finally, the literature related to Nsibidi origin, meaning and philosophy.

2.1 THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is drawn from Kubler (1962) and the conceptual framework is taken from Mathieu (2010).

Kubler theorises that:

‘Every important work of art can be regarded both as a historical event and as a hard-earned solution to a problem. It is irrelevant now whether the event was original or conventional, accidental, or willed, awkward or skilful. The important clue is that any solution points to the existence of some problem to which there have been other solutions and that other solutions to this same problem will most likely be invented to follow the one now in view. As the solutions accumulate, the problem alters. The chain of solutions nevertheless discloses the problem’ (Kubler, 1962, p.33).

For the sake of convenience, this theory will be explained thus:

Form = a hard-won solution to some problem and embodies a historical event.

Form, as a historical event: 'Form is evidence that at a point in time an idea had been impacted on material by way of human' (Echeta, 2011, p.2).

Form = solution to a problem that once existed, but has brought about another that requires a solution, which is Nsibidi symbol as a surface expression. The understanding is that form is an invention of someone's desire. This desire is primarily for function. It is practically supported and substantiated by researchers and scholars in the field of ceramics, among whom are Nelson (1971), Primmer (1974) and Hopper (2010), and many agree to the fact that desire or need for a storage vessel was the concept of form.

According to Primmer, 'evolution of pottery is linked to an early period in the life of man when agriculture was developed as a means of existence, and consequently, there was a need for sturdy containers in which to store grain' (Primmer, 1974, p.243). The need for containment in whatever manner is the stimulus for the production of any storage facility even in contemporary times. Kubler's further theory suggests the product of this desire is a work of art. He argues that a work of art can be regarded both as a historical event and as a hard-won solution to some problem (Kubler, 1962). The study finds truth in the theory. The explanation will be approached from two different directions: as 'historical' and 'hard-won solution to some problem' (Kubler, p.33). Clay is a plastic material used as a means of ceramics expression. It can be used to create conceptualized forms only when is in its plastic state. This means it is malleable and possesses the ability to retain shapes. This also implies that clay holds information by way of retaining fingerprints and the slightest gestures of its handler. Little wonder Levin (2010) views clay to be a very honest medium, unforgiving in its sensitivity as a recorder of information. However, one must understand the physical and firing properties of the material in order to make a success of it. Rawson argues that 'Every potter, especially primitive ones who use pottery, is aware of the nature and source of clay, as coming from the body of mother earth - a symbol for the most concrete objective reality, which is subjected to fire, which is also a symbol for celestial transmutation. This knowledge has certainly contributed a great deal to people's feelings for ceramics artifacts' (Rawson, 1971, p.23.).

‘As a hard-won solution to some problem’ (Kubler, 1962, p.33), ceramic shapes have to be fashioned to suit their intended use. This means the potter must develop or acquire the particular technology and skill to achieve their desired ceramics form. Hopper asserts that the process of developing beautiful forms came from diverse cultural backgrounds to meet the needs of a particular society at a particular time which is necessary for containment, and must have required different pottery shapes (Hopper, 2010, p.67). Thus, a form is a physical interpretation of an idea, meaning and skill; it is the culmination of the physical activities and processes employed in its creation; that impact on the material. Such processes include clay sourcing, preparation, idea, skill in materials and firing systems. While the conceptualized form has solved the self-expression problem, it equally throws up a new one: embellishment. However, Nsibidi symbols, as surface expression on ceramic pieces, are a solution to the existing problem of Nsibidi preservation, and these present themselves as a conceptual element for Nsibidi cultural preservation in Nigeria.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL THEORY

Mathieu conceptualizes ceramics as ‘the coming together of a form and a surface’ (Mathieu 2010, p.23). Matthieu added that form is generally articulated by volume, by empty interior space, while the surface remains conceptually distinct and separate from the form (Mathieu, 2010). The relation between form and surface so particular to ceramics is articulated around two main concepts:

‘function and decoration, where the concept of function is largely given by the volumetric form and self-expression which empties the interior of the shape and renders it practically available for containment, and where the concept of decoration is largely given by the surface expression’ (Mathieu, p.25). Form as a concept is articulated by function/aesthetic for containment. A surface is another concept articulated by expression or visual pleasure: perceived as an addendum and distinct from the form. The understanding here is that conceptualized form is the bearer of expression. But we must appreciate the fact that conceptualized forms have their own aesthetic purpose and surface.

This is known as *form-surface*. It is on this surface that another surface known as embellishment is brought to bear. Thus, form-surface is the ground upon which surface-embellishment is established. In Kubler (1962) form is a carrier or vehicle or holder or bearer of meaning. Meaning here is the information which surface expression/decoration presents. By way of confirmation, Cartwright asserts that Greek pottery has provided us with a glimpse into the lives, activities and beliefs of a long-gone people, for whom we sometimes have no contemporary written record (Cartwright, 2018, p.1). This window is largely understood as *surface-decoration*. Given that the coming together of form and surface is credible, the study argues that the two elements neither have unity of purpose conceptually nor a unified expression. Firstly, a surface expression is distinct from its host form; worse, it jeopardizes the form's integrity by claiming 'visual dominance' and diverting the viewer's attention away from the object (Bish, 2009, p.46). This is evident on the surfaces of ceramic pieces from the well-known Meissen and Vincennes factories, as well as Attic Greek vases. They often receive more attention for their pictorial representation than for the pots themselves. This problem can be simplified as: form is a solution to the problem of desire or need for containment but presents a vacuum of plain form-surface. Surface expression is the solution to the problem presented by form-surface. Form is the ground upon which Nsibidi symbol as a surface expression is totally dependent, since it cannot exist in a vacuum. Form presents Nsibidi symbols an opportunity to be preserved.

This research finds truth in the Kubler and Mathieu theories and considers them relevant to the study, because they regard works of art as historical events linking tradition to the history of art. The research concepts and perspectives represent the exact approach as method.

2.3 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTS OF FORM

The origin and development of form are perhaps universal as art. Holmes (2006), writing on classical ceramic forms, holds the opinion that the ancient and modern aboriginal America probably affords a fairer glimpse into the early stages of the development of forms than could be said of other regions. He further claims that the innate genius of the American race ensured steady development of creative engagement when more evolved nations were already reaching the civilizational threshold. Unlike Greece, Egypt, and the Orient, where the start of art is shrouded in the shadows of uncountable ages, America, he claims, leaps out in the brightness of the very present.

One should not be engrossed in the Eurocentric narratives and consequently forget the cradle of human civilization, with particular reference to the pyramidal forms of ancient Egypt in Africa and the many items of ritual and cultural expression which later inspired Western masters such as Picasso. Birch (1858) shared in this opinion when he noted that the presence of earthen vessels in Egypt was at least coexistent with the formation of a written language, but Holmes countered by asserting that all pre-Columbian American pottery predates the acquisition of written language, and this contrast is emphasized by the fact that it also supersedes the use of the wheel: it is commonly held that the wheel originated in Mesopotamia around 3500 BC. However, to substantiate this argument, it is probable that these developments at some point occurred simultaneously and independently across different regions of the world. Throughout the historical development of ceramic forms, two phenomena seem to be prominent, as concerns the evolution of aesthetic culture: form and surface embellishment. Various forms have evolved in relation to shapes and aesthetics concerns of the particular period. To this end, it may be accepted that simplicity may have characterized primitive forms, while advanced societies tend towards complex forms. In any case, form generation is dependent on certain factors: available shapes and resources, as well as a prevalent culture of a given environment. For example, most historic pots of African descent clearly assume the shapes of baskets, calabashes or gourds. This is because of nature's provision of these items which form the ideal model of reference for generation of form (Primmer, 1974, p.243; Hopper, 2000, p. 51).

It should be noted that there might also be a likelihood of new forms evolving in response to cross-cultural influences. Indeed, it is not the period of art that defines form, but the degree and state of art from which it emerges and coexists (Rice, 2002, p.19). Pottery making as a generational craft passes down from one generation to the next. A particular age may configure new forms and adopt decorations from existing art or previous generations, as well as imagery from collective worldviews. This is because forms and surface seem to be the hybridity of independent variables (Hopper 2010, p. 52). While forms often assume static presence, surface bears iconic symbolism or motifs embodying indigenous webs of relationships and interlinks ages which often bear the imprints of a given environment, decipherable through technology used, methods employed and embedded creative ideas.

FORMS BY ADVENTURE

The development of forms could be grouped into several derivative procedures. That is, the various sources of form conception and generation. Certain forms are derived by adventure while others may be created by imitation (natural models/artificial models) and forms by invention. Adventitious forms are accidentally derived. These are achieved by chance, like serendipity, such as wobbled pots or forms indented by hand, foot, shell, stone or wood.

It is speculated that perhaps most forms in history were achieved by this means as wet clay has the tendency to retain the shape or form imposed on it when dried (Hopper, 2010, p.14, Nelson, 1971, p1-2). Contemporary artists have adopted adventitious forms as a means of experimentation and expression, which affords expansive creativity and possibilities of uniqueness.

FORMS BY IMITATION

Potters of old and in the modern phase of artistic development had modes of creation that are not identical. The tendency to generate absolutely new forms was slim.

They relied almost entirely on what was indicated by prior forms; and the procedures of constructing forms were so restricted and straightforward, that recognizing existing resources allowed one to closely forecast the eventual results. Rather than inventing, forms were imitated and reproduced from natural originals, whether animal or vegetable; naturally, they differed with the country and climate, giving rise to individual qualities in art forms that are usually exceedingly tenacious and enduring changes of environment. The gourd is probably the most varied and suggestive natural vessel. This is also true for cultures located near the sea or huge rivers, where mollusc shells, frequently without modification, serve as ideal receptacles for water and food. Imitations of these can frequently be seen among potter's wares. Natural materials, such as coconut shells and ostrich eggs, are utilized in the same way in Africa and other nations. Basketry and other types of woven containers take a wide range of forms and, as a general precursor to and continuous companion to the potter's work, have left an indelible imprint on ceramic forms. This can be found in practically all nations' pottery. An example of clay work portraying imitations is that of Kate Malone (see Figs. 3 and 4), a British studio potter (Rice, 2002).



Figure 3
Artist: Kate Malone
Title: *Pineapple vase*
Year: 2020



Figure 4
Artist: Kate Malone
Title: *Pumpkin with curly stem*
Year: 2020

MODIFICATION OF FORM

The acquisition of new materials, the creation of new applications, the adoption of new production methods, and a variety of other factors all contribute to the proliferation of forms through modification. A simple lack of ability on the part of the potter who attempted to replicate a model would result in the modification of everything but the most basic shapes. The adoption of the art by a more or less advanced cultures or by one of the several different practices would result in significant modifications. People who were used to carrying objects on their heads would shape the bases and handles of earthen pots to enable this use. Improvements in technological advances are of the utmost importance in the advancement of art. The development of the lathe, for example, could virtually completely change clay form. Aside from the forms imposed on them by their forefathers and associates, clay vessels would inevitably be vulnerable to changes indicated by man's growing demands. These would be sorted out with ever-increasing ease by his developing inventive talent. The ability gained through working with clay in the construction of vessels and efforts to expand their usefulness would open a vast arena for imaginative play. The potter would be able to realize his ability to duplicate forms other than vessels as soon as he succeeded in reproducing vessels with life form. His desire would eventually drive him beyond the limitations of nature, into the realm of imagination, expressing superstitious ideas in plastic clay. The assignment of vessels of specific types to specific rites would foster and prolong this tendency (Rice 1989).

2.4 DEFINITION OF FORMS

Form in art has two characteristics: it can refer to the overall form taken by the work – its physical character – or it can refer to the element of shape among the numerous pieces that make up a work (Tate, 1992). Form is one of the seven components of art that depicts a three-dimensional entity in space.

It is a formal examination of a work of art that outlines how the elements and principles of the artwork interact regardless of their meaning or the feelings or thoughts they may generate in the spectator. Lisa (2014) maintained that the term 'form' refers to the physical nature of an artwork, such as a metal sculpture, an oil painting, ceramic vases, drawing, textile or graphics. It is a known fine art medium, or an unorthodox one done skilfully, adroitly or creatively, that elevates it to the level of fine art. Form is a visual tool that an artist employs when creating a work of art. Furthermore, form represents three-dimensionality and volume, with length, width and height, as opposed to shape, which is two-dimensional or flat. Banjoko (1988) in Nsentip (2006) claims that form is the visible appearance of a thing as it relates to the surroundings. This appearance is usually recognized by the outlines that compose the object. Forms, therefore, can be referred to as the composition, with a line starting at a point and closing at that point as near that starting point.

Form was the most significant aspect in art and was raised above all other elements of art until the birth of modern art, when colour became its opponent. The artist's goal in treating or creating form in art is to modify natural appearances, in order to create a new form that is expressive, or that expresses some experience or meaning of itself. The idea grew in modern art that form might be expressive even if it was substantially or fully removed from appearances (Tate, 1992, n.p.). Clive Bell, a critic, created the term 'important form' to describe this in 1914: the concept was crucial in the evolution of abstract art. Even space can have form, the sculptor Henry Moore remarked that 'A hole can have as much shape meaning as a solid mass' (Tate, 2013).



Figure 5: Recumbent Figure

Year: 1938

By: Henry Moore OM, CH

Source: Museum of Modern Art

According to Silka (2016), the tale of form is, above anything, a story about issues of space, depth, light, and the production of an illusion by the use of line, shape, texture, value, space, and colour; form in art helps artists create the perception of 3D and depth on a two-dimensional surface. However, Zangwill emphasizes that the historical foundation of the modern form including its topic on aesthetic formalism is commonly attributed to Immanuel Kant (2001, p. 84).

The philosopher Donald Crawford described Kant's view as follows: 'form consisting of spatial organizations of elements: shape, figure, or delineation... in the basic aspect of beauty as parts of the Critique of Judgment. Kant is a pure formalist consistently' (Gal 2015, p. 14).

As far as art is concerned, the origin and evolution of form are possibly universal. Ceramicists have always been guided by either aesthetic concerns or the traditional utility sense, which is heavily influenced by individual style and professional practice in terms of generating form. Contemporary artists have embraced unconventional forms as a means of experimentation and expression, allowing greater creativity and the creation of new forms. Conceptualization of a new ceramic form is evident towards an experimental approach to form and self-defining process, meaning every made ceramics piece has meaning.

2.5 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SURFACES IN CERAMICS

Surface decoration in ceramics embraces all styles of surface decorating techniques of any kind of the ceramic process and explains how to obtain these effects practically. As an element of form, surface decoration has been instrumental in reading and understanding habits, beliefs and societal norms of past civilizations, but it is independent of its host form. The earliest prehistoric pottery of Gravettian culture discovered in the Czech Republic, dating back to 29,000-25,000 BCE, shows engraved surface decoration of some utilitarian objects, which suggests that pattern, symbols, and abstracted images were at least that far back in the prehistoric period. However, Greek decoration on ceramics is considered in this research, because of its impact on people and cultures over time, and history of ceramics reveals that form and surfaces of the ancient Greek was very impactful: the impact is universal, cutting across time to this very day. Around 1000 BCE, the Classical Greek culture began to emerge, with a range of well-crafted ceramics that included the human figure as a decorative motif (Osarumwense & Peter, 2017, p.50). Cartwright (2018) argues that the pottery of ancient Greece from around 1000 to 400 BCE contains the most distinctive vase shapes from antiquity, and also one of the longest and most varied representations of the ancient Greeks' traditional ideas and practices as narrative pattern. Furthermore, because of its resilience (even when shattered) and lack of appeal to hunters, pottery is one of the great archaeological survivors and is thus a significant tool for archaeologists and historians in ascertaining the chronology of ancient Greece. Whatever their artistic and historical value, the large number of items of Greek pottery, despite the majority now being dusty museum pieces, were originally meant for everyday use, and, to summarize Arthur Lane, it is perhaps worth remembering that they would have once gleamed in the Mediterranean sun while standing on a stone pavement and drenched with water.



Figure 6: A hydria (an ancient Greek vessel)

Source: British Museum

According to Cartwright (2018), Greek pottery, notably in terms of decoration, evolved over the centuries and may be classified into four basic groups:

- Proto-geometric pottery
- Geometric pottery
- Black-figure pottery
- Red-figure pottery

These groupings or styles, however, did not transition quickly from one to the other, but rather remained current for decades in certain cases. Furthermore, some city-states and regions were either sluggish to adopt new styles or just liked the old-type ornamentation long after it had been phased out elsewhere. Furthermore, several cities and regions (particularly Laconia-Sparta, Cyprus, Crete and Boeotia) were persistently quirky in their ornamentation and decided to follow their own artistic path, rather than emulate the styles of the more dominant centres, such as Athens and Corinth (Cartwright, 2018). Around 1000 BCE, or possibly earlier, the first peculiar Greek pottery style arose. Early Greek ceramic design used simple shapes sparingly, reminiscent of the previous Greek civilizations of Minoan Crete and the Mycenaean mainland Proto-geometric pottery; on the other hand, varies shape from Minoan and Mycenaean vase's centre of gravity is shifted downhill (producing a more stable vessel), and the feet and neck are more dynamic.



Figure 7: a 7th century BCE amphora displaying the common design motifs of the Geometric style of Greek pottery. (Painted with multiple brushes fixed to a compass), semi-circles and horizontal lines in black and with large areas of the vase painted solely in black.

Source: Mark Cartwright

A new motif on the most renowned Proto-geometric designs was accurately painted circles at the base of vessels, which would remain for generations and become a staple component of later black-figure pottery design (Cartwright, 2018).

According to Cartwright (2018), the full Geometric design appeared around 900 BCE and valued the rectangular area on the main body of the vase between the handles.

The bold linear motifs (perhaps influenced by modern basketwork and weaving forms) arose, with vertical line design on either side. It was around the time of the Mæander design (possibly inspired by the technique of wrapping leaves around the rims of metal bowls) that it first appeared, destined to become permanently identified with Greece and still popular on everything from plates to beach towels today. Geometric pottery lower halves were frequently painted black and separated from the rest of the vase by horizontal lines. The circular box with a flat lid, on top of which one to four horses worked as a handle, was indeed an unusual Geometric style shape that appeared then (Cartwright, 2018, n.p).



Figure 8: Attic black figure vase shows Theseus killing the Minotaur of the Cretan labyrinth. Late 6th-early 5th century BCE. Source: Archaeological Museum, Milan

The black stylized figures were engraved more precisely and with greater detail, grace and vigour. Geometric pottery decoration began to feature idealized human figures, birds and animals around the 8th century BCE, with practically the entire surface of the vessel covered with bold lines and forms painted in brown and black. The Orientalising style became prominent at Corinth near the end of the 7th century BCE. With its eastern trading contacts, the city adopted Egyptian and Assyrian pottery's stylized vegetation (e.g. lotus, palm and the tree of life), animal friezes (e.g. lions) and curved lines to create its own distinct Greek version. The region of eastern Greece followed suit, with red on a white slip background being a popular choice. Athens adopted the new fashion, and it spread, with the Cyclades, for example, creating pottery in this emerging freer style, typically on very big vases with more spacious ornamentation.

Proto-Corinthian pottery achieved new heights of technique and quality at the end of the 7th century BCE, producing the finest pottery yet seen in terms of firing, shape and design. The black stylized figures were engraved with increasing precision and detail, grace and vigour. The well-known black-figure ceramic style was created at this time (Cartwright, 2018, n.p).

Surface decoration on the pottery of ancient Greece is parallel to the study. Its surface pattern has inspired the research and has opened a window for the research artifacts to create a narrative story with Nsibidi symbols as it relates to Nsibidi meanings. The diverse representation of the cultural beliefs and practices which the Greek pottery treasures is what the research builds on for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural symbols.

2.6 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN ARTS AND CERAMICS

To understand the context of my ceramic practice and Nsibidi cultural background, it was critical to understand the origins and evolution of Nigerian art and ceramics. Art is a manifestation of the author/artist/imaginative artiste's efforts. Art could be visual, verbal or performed. Every kind of life contains art. Art is the most enigmatic term, since its meaning differs from person to person. Art is a form of expression; art is whatever the artist declares it to be (Aniakor, 1998, p.16).

Nigerian art has evolved from ancient times, while remaining consistent in terms of styles and techniques. Nigerian art, both past and present, has always been adventurous and clever, with rich cultural meaning. The only difference between them is the narrative they tell. Nigerian art has a long history that predates the conception of such productions as art. However, the known history of Nigerian art stretches back two hundred thousand years. There are countless traditional art pieces, and origins of Nigerian arts and crafts, that only ancestors can describe how it all began. The number of traditional arts and their origins is infinite (Agboke, 2018, p.3).

Nigerian traditional art is obviously rich and diverse. Its history is tied to a long chain of events and works.

Some significant works have been associated with the African Iron Age, and historians have traced considerable evidence of the early usage of iron in Africa to Nigeria, a West African country.

In central Nigeria, in the same location as Nok, between the Niger River and the Benue River, iron works have been uncovered. The site dates to about 300 BCE in the early Iron Age; a series of sculptures left behind by the Nok people are especially fascinating. These barrel-shaped clay figures, with piercing eyes and widespread lips, were eventually the inspiration to many of Nigeria's modern artists from the 1960s. The Igbo Ukwu earthen pots and the Ife terracotta heads are also notable objects of clay origin (Onuzulike, 2009).



Figure 9: Terracotta head from Nok, 300BC
Source: Onuzulike 2019

The historical background of contemporary ceramics cannot be complete in isolation without tracing the origin of contemporary Nigerian arts in general. Though Nigeria's traditional art has a very lengthy history, its modern phase is short and intricate, and began in 1903 with the work of the pioneer Aina Onabolu (Onuzulike, 2009).

Onabolu (1882-1963), the first modern artist in Nigeria, was characterized by sources from literature reviews. He was hence classified as the father of Nigerian modern art. In several schools in Lagos, Onabolu was Nigeria's pioneer instructor of art.

The British colonial administration engaged Kenneth C. Murray of England to teach art at many high schools in different parts of Nigeria, particularly in Lagos, Ibadan and Umahia, through its continuous promotion of the educational art program in Nigeria. 'Murray has received recognition for incorporating local content into his educational approach by promoting his students to paint genre topics such as palm wine and village market scenes' (Onuzulike, 2009, 71).

C. C. Ibeto, Uthman M. Ibrahim, D. L. K. Nnachy, A. P. Umana and Ben Enwonwu were Murray's first five prominent students, who received training between 1933 and 1936.

There is little proof that Murray taught his students how they may build a simple kiln to fire and glaze works in clay, as none of these pioneers of Nigerian modern artists taught by Murray emerged as a ceramicist. Murray worked with some local potters to train them to modernize their production by utilizing kilns and glazed materials, but the initiative could not be maintained (Onuzulike, 2009). This study finds, however, that this is the earliest effort to incorporate ceramic art into the education program in Nigeria.

The pottery of Ibadan, led by an expatriated potter D. Roberts, was confirmed by Oladipo (2004), in their book *Origin and Growth of Contemporary Pottery in Nigeria in 1904*. In 1951 Nigeria founded its first modern pottery centre, called Abuja Pottery. The Northern Nigerian government's pioneering efforts were made with the assistance of Michael Cardew, a British potter at the Abuja pottery centre. The centre encouraged local potters trained there to blend traditional pottery forms and techniques with foreign ones. The now-popular Ladi Kwali, one of the trainees, took advantage of these opportunities to produce high-fired kilns and glazes to modify her customary inventive embellishments of pottery pieces.

This early 1950s synthesis of local forms and techniques with those from outside for the production of modern ceramic works was a significant forerunner to events later that decade at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology (NCAST), Zaria – now Ahmadu Bello University (Onuzulike, 2009).

In 1958, a group of students known as the 'Zaria Rebels' and led by Uche Okeke, created the Zaria Art Society and rejected the academic programme, which had little or no African content.

They produced a manifesto titled *Natural Synthesis*, in which they wanted to take the best from their Nigerian traditional heritage and blend it with the finest from elsewhere, for the purpose of creating a better future distinct identity, which has become the focal point of contemporary Nigerian art (Onuzulike, 2009).

Onuzulike asserts that: 'This implied accepting much of European media and technique (while not excluding experimentation with these) and developing styles and content that were close to the Nigerian students' experience, whether it be their own cultural tradition, that of other Nigerian cultures, or current Nigerian life.' (Onuzulike, 2009, n.p).

Onuzulike further added that after graduating from Zaria in 1960, one of the Art Society members, Demas Nwoko, began to study terracotta sculptures in the Nok style in a creative endeavour described as a 'Revival of Nok Terracotta' by Nigerian art historian Chike Aniakor. In 1966, he established seminars in Ibadan to teach a modified system of traditional open-firing processes and to arouse people's interest in the clay form (Onuzulike, 2009).

Aniakor, according to Onuzulike (2009), was fascinated by the rich textures of terracotta works such as that of Nok and traditional pottery and was driven by a desire to attain similar results in his own works. Onuzulike sought out a new firing device to replace the traditional method of firing, which does not generate enough heat, as this limited his artistic needs. The current kiln firing method is likewise limited, and it enforces a uniform colour on a pottery object. As a workaround, the artist invented a fire procedure in which the fuel burned in close touch with the pieces in the kiln. This technical approach involves the union of history and change of creativity and innovation pottery development (Onuzulike, 2009).

From the early 1970s, a substantial development took place at Nsukka, championed by the American-trained Igbo ceramicist Benjo Igwilo. Igwilo joined the faculty of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1973, after receiving an MFA in ceramics from Alfred University in New York, USA.

By combining engobe ornamentation and glazes with the pottery shapes and techniques of the Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria, he began to extend the work of Michael Cardew and Ladi Kwali of Abuja Pottery fame.

Interestingly, he did so by utilizing the formal and aesthetic resources of the Igbo traditional body and wall painting practice known as 'uli', a singular creative inquiry that marked the Nsukka School for almost three decades. Igwilo and his students were well recognized in the 1970s (particularly) and 1980s for high-fired ceremonial and aesthetic pots that established a blend of the traditional and the modern, as seen in the works of Ahuwan's work (Fig. 12) and Onuzulike's pot (Fig. 16) (Onuzulike, 2009).

Later in the late 1970s, El Anatsui (now widely considered the top modern African artist) experimented with stoneware clay (manganese body) for his broken pots series, as seen in his work titled '*We De Patch Am*' (see Fig. 10), before moving on to his more well-known mural wood sculptures. Nok terracotta and Igbo Ukwu pottery were among his sources (see Fig 9). El Anatsui is a Ghana-born experimental sculptor who has taught in Nigeria, at Nsukka's Department in Fine and Applied Arts since 1975 (Onuzulike, 2009).

Chris Echeta, one of Anatsui's students (who studied in ceramics at Nsukka), has worked with clay since 1979, producing political works. Echeta's selection of materials includes clay, engobe and glaze (Onuzulike, 2009).

Ige Ibigbami also investigated stacked terracotta pots at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, south-Western Nigeria, beginning in the 1970s. He took inspiration for his creations, which have been described as 'pillar pots,' from traditional Yoruba pottery. The works are so named because of their installation format, which consists of a series of pots stacked on top each other until they took a tower pillar shape. 'Pillar pots' became a ceramic art style linked with Ife artists such as Tunde Nasiru and it was practiced there until recently (Onuzulike, 2009).



Figure 10

Title: *We De Patch*

Artist: El Anatsui

Source: Onuzulike 2019

The above narrative depicts the key streams of art growth in Nigeria from the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s.

It demonstrates that there was no major shift away from the use of clay and terracotta surface decoration for political themes (Onuzulike, 2009). There is no doubt that ceramic (pottery) is one of the oldest traditional practices in Nigeria. It is also an ancient craft that is still being practiced in most parts of the country today. This is not only true in Nigeria, but perhaps in the whole world, as supported by Igwilo (1983), who stated that art through the ages is a universal language, hence the making of pots was not confined to certain races or cultures. It was something that was bound to occur through man's unavoidable contact with the earth or clay. He equally remarked that the development of pottery was almost the same everywhere from the Greek civilization to Egypt, Mesopotamia and Nigeria (Igwilo, 1983, p. 42).

Pottery making is the art of producing earthen wares from raw materials of clay, through throwing on the wheel, hand building and slip casting methods. The pottery products made through these processes are usually fired in the kiln.

Pottery practice in Nigeria is an age-old art and technology which existed over two thousand years ago. It is embedded in the cultural practice of the people, due to its relevance and functions before the invasion of the colonial masters.

It is a known fact that not all human activities or actions are acted generally for continuity and preservation due to their appropriateness and relevance. Michael (1971), cited by Edem and Gadzama (2019), observes that it is usually strongly felt that many things foster taste, value and perceptions without appearing as actual laws, as long as they are connected with past histories. In the same way, these seemingly latent or subliminal aspects of culture and how they shape perception lie at the root in the origin of artwork. Nok terracotta or pottery wares are located in the culture of Nok people in the Jos plateau area of Nigeria, which existed from about 500 BCE. The pottery wares from Nok and Igbo Ukwu were other ancient cultures in Nigeria that express the uniqueness of the early people's way of life. Although the wares were a high fired to boost the level of pottery technology then; but none of the pottery wares had glaze on them until the full contact with the influence of British pottery, probably about 1929 to date.

According to Ekong (2002, p. 2), ceramic has been the primary source of historical record, especially because of its strength after firing. Agberia (1996) in Ekong (2002, p. 2) agrees that ceramic has traditionally and culturally been very common and useful to man from primitive times. There are different dates suggested by different authors concerning the exact origin of ceramic/pottery. Nigerian culture is represented through various genres, such as dance, literature, music, arts & crafts, fashion and others. The Nok culture is found along the Benue River. Although it is not the first settlement of ancient Nigeria, it can be argued that the Nok civilization paved the way for the development of other people's cultures.

The ordinary Nigerian views his or her country's art as profound, distinct and Afrocentric. Nigerian art focuses on sculpture, masks, textiles, pottery, graphics, etc. The majority of these works of art are housed in foreign museums in colonial countries. Many were stolen from the country in an attempt to eliminate the continent, while others were offered in trade for other foreign and exciting objects to our forefathers.

Despite the fact that slavery removed a large portion of Nigerian culture from history books and art objects, essential details of Nigerian creative heritage persisted on the tongues of its people, who narrated the story to the next generation.

Nok Art, Ife Art and Benin Art are examples of significant Nigerian art that everyone hears about in social studies, but there is more to Nigeria traditional art pieces and its origins.

The history of contemporary ceramics in Nigeria cannot be told without further mentioning Ladi Kwali, a modern clay potter in the early 1950s, who was a native Kwali in Gwari village, a town located in the heartland of the old Abuja Emirate.

Agberia (2007) remarked that the Kwali community has been producing pottery that is immediately identified with the group for many decades. Nsentip (2006) asserts that, as a result of long-standing pottery practices, their forms are typical for their community: the place in which Ladi Kwali lived and also made earthenware pots. As an outcome, it is understandable that she created pottery that was distinctively Kwali, but accented with her own particular style. Therefore, the traditional cultural setting in which she lived and worked was a key element in her forms and styles. The structure of her fundamental material – clay – was also heavily influenced by Ladi's deep intellectual feelings, as her method mandated and the uniformity shown in each item she generated (Nsentip, 2006).

Okunna claims that the development of contemporary ceramics in Nigeria was greatly influenced by renowned British potter Michael Cardew's and Ladi Kwali's work at the Abuja Pottery centre (Okunna, 2012, p. 1). Cardew is not part of this research, but his contribution to the advancement of Nigerian pottery is significant, as this brought the knowledge of throwing wheels and glazes to most potters in the 1950s. The establishment of the Abuja Pottery Training Centre in 1951 (now Suleja) was carried out by Cardew. The Northern Nigerian Government had invited him to set up a training centre, where local potters from the rural villages all over the northern part of Nigeria could be trained in the techniques of modern pottery, using locally available raw materials, with the aim of incorporating traditional values with modern technology (Agberia, 2007, p.15).

The training programme as established by Cardew covered every aspect of pottery production, and the training was based on workshop practices, which included learning by production, in order to gain familiarity with new ways of production: throwing on the potters' wheels and glazing at relatively high temperature.

It was in the process of sourcing for raw materials that Cardew stumbled on the unique pottery collection of the Emir of Suleja and the Emir introduced the traditional potter to Ladi Kwali, who was living in the neighbouring village of Kwali, about 48 kilometres from Suleja. Cardew insisted on meeting Ladi Kwali and recruiting her. She accepted and joined the Pottery Training Centre in 1954 (Agberia, 2007, p. 40).

This was a turning point in Ladi Kwali's life, thus transitioning her from tradition to modernity. She saw herself in a whole new realm. That shift indicated a defining moment in her life and ceramic art practice, while the year also highlighted an important interface between her personality's art and the historical experience of her life.

Ladi was not only obliged to accustom herself to her new environment, but to forsake her traditional production practices and skills for a new Western technology, due to the change from traditional to contemporary technology (Okunna, 2012, p. 2).

Ladi had to work and make pottery on the potter's wheel in a circumstance that strongly clashed with what was in the traditional cultural sphere. It was the initial sensation in her ceramic manufacturing of Western technology. The firing of pottery was no longer an open firing to her, but instead with a Western-manufactured technology called the "kiln". Ladi would no longer make terracotta, she would preferably have her art pieces glazed. Ladi Kwali was thus confronted with a stark contrast between the traditional and the modern, and these two distinct spheres compelled her as she moved from one transition of experience to the next.



Figure 11: Ladi Kwali's traditional *Gbagyi* pot, which she produced at the Pottery Training Centre, showing a tremendous advancement of her skill in Surface Ornamentation.

Source: Ladi Kwali Pottery Centre, Abuja.

Year 2018

There was therefore no exception to Ladi's customary ceramics. Their technological nature of producing pottery vases, for example, remained 'unchanged; the pots were made without throwing them on the potter's wheel; the ceramics pots are always open fired; they are never glazed, although some of them are given the surface finish that would be mistaken for a glaze piece' (Okunna, 2012, p.4). The most significant practical advantage of traditional pottery over glazed ware is that it may be used over an open wood fire for cooking without risk of shattering. This advantage of traditional pottery is considered better than the usual glazed pottery, and the only competitors are the flame-retardant porcelain and modern glassware.

The surface embellishment of Ladi Kwali's traditional pottery is perhaps one of her most distinguishing features. Her ceramics were notable for their carved animal forms ornamentation.

She loved figural motifs such as scorpions, lizards, crocodiles, snakes, chameleons, birds and fish, but she also made pots with geometric, linear designs (Okunna, 2012).

Michael Cardew's contribution was significant, as his exploration and scouring for local materials from the beginning of modern pottery practice developments in Nigeria brought in the awareness for the new ceramic art which this research builds on. Ladi Kwali became famous under the tutelage of Cardew, and this brought immeasurable advancement in her ceramic practice and to the Abuja Pottery Centre in Nigeria (Agberia, 2007).

The remarkable history of contemporary ceramics in Nigeria and its tremendous achievements cannot be mentioned without the contributions of the following prominent people: Yakubu, Levi, Abbas Ahuwan, Ozioma Onuzulike and Chris Echeta, who are the leading contemporary clay artists since the late 1970s (Ozioma, 2009, p. 1). Abbas Ahuwan was born in 1947 in Nigeria. He is a lecturer at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. Abbas is a member of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), the Craft Potters Association, the Nigerian Society for Education through Art, the National Council for the Education of Ceramic Arts and the Arts Council of the African Studies Association. He is also a founding member of the Ceramic Researchers' Association of Nigeria and served as its president from 2002-2011. In the 1990s, he was honoured by the association for his contributions to the development of modern ceramics throughout Nigeria (Ahuwan, 1999).

Ahuwan was also trained at Michael Cardew's Abuja Pottery Centre in the 1960s and advocated experiments in burnished and smoked pot sculptures that made reference to northern Nigerian architecture, musical instruments and traditional Hunkuyi decorative shapes in the 1980s. (See Fig. 12) (Onuzulike, 2009).



Figure 12

Abbas Ahuwan's work titled *Kimkim*.

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Year: 1989

Levi Yakubu is also a phenomenon worthy of an academic study. He studied alongside icons such as Ladi Kwali, Benjo Igwilo, Abbas Ahuwan, Chris Echeta, and Ozioma Onuzulike, who are the most recognized personalities in Nigeria's artistic history, beginning in the 1980s. Levi O'Ben Yakubu, better known as Dajo, is a member of the Tiv ethnic group, native to Benue State, born in 1954 (Okunna, 2012). He inherited a great ceramic legacy passed down through four generations of his family. Dajo ascended from obscurity to prominence through hard labour and tenacity, eventually becoming the proprietor of Benue State's first pottery company. He is the current President and Chief Executive Officer of Dajo Pottery Limited. He graduated from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria in 1979 with a degree in Industrial Design, majoring in Industrial Ceramics (Okunna, 2012).

Vershima and Morakinyo (2014) asserted that Dajo's pottery combines the current traditional method of pottery production with modern techniques to create his masterpieces.

He appears to follow the postmodernist ideological posture, which strives to integrate the coexistence of traditional ceramics with their diverse cultural approaches which is contemporary high-tech ceramics production practice in Nigeria. This method, one assumes, is used to deal with current industrialization issues, while also keeping up with the resurrection of cultural activities portrayed through art.

Okunna added that it's fascinating to witness Dajo express himself through a variety of clays, strange forms, unconventional ideas and design techniques. He has created works with his cultural identity, political themes and other subjects that present a memorial and inquisitive unity. His art is best defined as a synthesis of culture and modernism. Dajo's artifacts are conserved in galleries as periodic windows into Nigeria's past and present, and includes works such as '*African Queen, African Drum*', '*The African Lizard*', '*Gecko on a Tree Stump*', '*Victory for Nigeria*', '*Adam and Eve*', '*Wise Candle Girls*', '*Light Through the Drum*' and '*Expectant Mother*' (see Fig 13 and 14) (Okunna,2012).

Nzewi claims that Dajo has dived into his local culture and absorbed motifs, symbols, myths and tales, which he portrayed in his works, thereby conserving them as subjects of study. He added that his works relate so many legendary stories connected with the Tivs and other tribes, offering a strong conceptual framework from which to generate study questions (Nzewi, 2006, p. 125). Dajo's works have a rich confluence of inspiration and subject matter that can provide historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists with intriguing sources of information about the Tiv culture.



Figure 13:
Levi Yakubu Exotic Vases: Flower vase with Tiv Colours
Source: Dajo's Pottery Gallery, Makurdi.
Year 2010



Figure 14: Levi Yakubu's work

Title: *The African Lizard*

Source: Dajo's Pottery Gallery, Makurdi

Year 2010

Ozioma Onuzulike is another clay artist of the 1980s whose potential is in his wheel-throwing and hand-modelling abilities, especially as a means of generating forms that are then experimentally altered to arrive at new ceramic designs; innovative use of design as a strategy for optimum kiln-space management and fuel economy; decoration of ceramic forms using improvised turning and scraping tools for new aesthetic looks, especially in table wares; and expansion of the conceptual possibilities in ceramic art through mixed media strategies. Onuzulike was born in 1972 and is from Achi in Enugu State in Nigeria. He is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Ozioma Onuzulike has been creating ceramic ware that speaks to the observer not only as sculpture, but also as visual poetry, for over a decade and a half (Onuzulike, 2018, p. 2).

Despite his great technical proficiency, his artworks hint to chance and tend to occupy rich intellectual terrain as metaphor.



Figure 15: Ozioma Onuzulik's Tableware as sculpture and poetry
Source: Ceramics Art & Perception Magazine (Online), 2018

At first appearance, they are simple and appear to contradict the primary role for which they were designed, which is to serve at meals. On second glance, however, they present us with the utilitarian dimension that we are accustomed to, and thus allow us to appreciate the forms and textures in relation to their function (Onuzulike, 2018). Depending on his creative temperament, Onuzulike creates work that is either figurative or abstract, natural or artificial, either to create immediately-recognizable forms that serve a known role, or non-representational forms that play with our expectations about their function. (See Figs. 15 and 16).



Figure 16: Ozioma Onuzulike's work. Traditional pot
Source: Ceramics Art & Perception Magazine (Online), 2018

Later in the 1980s, there was Echeta, a clay artist who created a significant corpus of work, the majority of which explored social topics and satirized poor leadership and the resulting suffering of the common man. Chris was born in 1953 and is a ceramics lecturer at Federal University, Lafia Nasarawa State in Nigeria. His fundamental concerns stem from his experiences throughout the bloody Civil War, which brought his early education to a halt from 1967 to 1970 (Onuzulike, Nwigwe and Okafor, 2013). The war had a significant impact on him, conditioning him to really appreciate his teachers' artistic activity (particularly Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor, Obiora Udechukwu, and El Anatsui), which has shown exceptional awareness to the human condition. Echeta has also produced a distinctive range of utilitarian wares. According to Onuzulike (2007), Chris Echeta's utilitarian pieces are better categorized as based on function rather than conventional ceramics, because of a strictly formal classification.

This is because their form follows function - a feature characteristic of utilitarian ceramics. In this case, therefore, Echeta's utilitarian series follow the classification based on function.

Onuzulike further stated that Echeta's use of strategic negative cut-outs or slits on the walls of ceramic forms constitutes his major technique of realizing poetic images and highly activated surfaces (see fig 17) (Onuzulike, (2007).

Echeta asserts that 'forms in ceramics production give the clay its power to draw attention to itself' (Echeta 2001, p.11). This energy is a function of a creative investment bequeathed on that cold and passive material. The creative protocol, through a high level of technical mastery, injects the appropriate dose of diligence into the process to 'heal' the clay. 'This healing process, as it were, peels off the innate dormancy of the clay and activates the potential which, for centuries, has been lurking in its bowels' (Echeta, 2001, p.11).

The forms, clothed by irresistible finishes, inhabit, by request, high-profile diplomatic offices, and side chests as pots of excellence in utility and aesthetics.

These much-wanted instruments of class become so trusted that they remain unmistakable vehicles along the highway between the mouths of nobles, chiefs, across cultures, into their stomachs. The explorative hands of the ceramic's artist have embroidered this (Echeta, 2001, p.9). As indicated above, Echeta contributed to the change in direction of contemporary ceramics from its conventional, historical and technological constraints by broadening the aesthetic possibilities to include sculpturally expressive forms.



Figure 17: Chris Echeta's work titled: *Stitching the wounds of history*, 2018.
37 & 38 cm. (14½ & 15 in.) Terracotta and wire sculpture
Source: MutualArt (Online), 2020

The historical trend continued through the earliest art schools in the 1950s to date. By 2000, works in mixed media, exploration for installations incorporating ceramic materials, as well as other media for conventional sculptural ceramics in the Nigerian art became the context; while the contemporary ceramicists have diversified styles, which probably emanated from the multi-ethnicity of Nigeria (Ahuwan, 2003, p.18-22). Onuzulike synthesizes the philosophy, motifs and materials of traditional and contemporary society to evolve his art through technique in order to forge relevance. Just like his work '*Suyascape*' shows a complete departure from conventional ceramics, thereby projecting a requirement for in-depth contemplation (see Fig 18).



Figure 18: Onuzulike's work 2009 titled: *Suyascape series*
Source: Onuzulike 2019

The preceding narrative summarizes the key lines of ceramic art development in Nigeria to date. It demonstrates that there was no fundamental break from the utilitarian, decorative, historical impact or political manifestations of clay and glaze. And the historical trend continued throughout to date. The narrative above shows that there is a research gap for the exploration of Nsibidi symbols in clay and a need for documentation from the beginning of Nigerian art until recently, where a few painters and textile designers such as Nnchiri, and the USA-based Nigerian artist Victor Ekpuk, exploded Nsibidi in other mediums.

There is still an existing gap around Nsibidi and conceptualized ceramic form, which this study is designed to fill.

2.7 NSIBIDI ORIGIN, MEANING AND PHILOSOPHY

The Nsibidi hermeneutic system (see Fig. 19) was developed by the Ékpè/Mgbè/Ngbè esoteric order of South-South and South-Eastern Nigeria and is an example of a body of knowledge and practices that provides rich ground for adaptive exploration in terms of philosophy and mysticism.

Ékpè/Mgbè/Ngbè are names from the Èfik, Éjághám and Èfút Nigerian ethnic groups respectively, all these names being variants of 'leopard', demonstrating this esoteric body as centred on the associations of the leopard as a primary symbolic resource, according to Nigeria's 2013 implementation for the placement of the Ékpè (leopard) (Marshall, 1992).

The etymology of the word Nsibidi is unknown; however, according to its explanation, the word comes from the Ekoid languages which means 'cruel letters' referring to the harsh laws of the secret organizations that retain Nsibidi knowledge. Nsibidi is usually linked with men's leopard societies such as Ekpe in Calabar. Before colonialism, leopard societies wielded legislative, judicial and executive power, particularly among the Efik, who exercised considerable power over the Cross River (Marshall, 1992, p.68).

The Ejagham people of the northern Cross River region are credited with the origin of Nsibidi, mostly because colonial administrators discovered the largest number and most variety of Nsibidi among them. Over time, Nsibidi spread throughout the region, blending with different cultures and creative forms such as Igbo uri or uli graphic design (Slogar, 2007, p. 18).

Macgregor (1909), who gathered Nsibidi symbols, stated that Nsibidi was traditionally thought to have come from the Igbo tribes of Uguakima, Ebe, or Uyanga who, mythology says, were taught the script by baboons. However, this writer feels Macgregor was deceived by his informants, as stated in *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 1995, p.105.

Nsibidi has a large sign language that is typically engraved on calabashes, brass ware, fabrics, wood sculptures, masquerade costumes, buildings and human skin. Nsibidi has been defined as a fluid communication system, comprised of hundreds of abstract and pictographic signs.

Macgregor (1909) characterized Nsibidi as a form of rudimentary secret writing during the colonial era and added that Nsibidi was used for messages carved or painted on split palm stems; and that the use of Nsibidi is that of common writing and is most graphically portrayed. Nsibidi transcended ethnic boundaries and served as a unifying element among the Cross River State regions.

Nsibidi (also spelled Nsibiri, nchibiddi, or nchibiddy) is a set of symbols, indigenous to what is now south-eastern Nigeria, that appear to be pictograms, while some have been argued to be logograms or syllabograms.

The symbols are centuries old, at least: early designs appear on excavated pottery, as well as ceramic stools and headrests of the Calabar region most frequently, with dates ranging between 400 and 1400 CE, when there were more than 500 of the thousands of Nsibidi symbols (Slogar 2007: 19).

Many of the Nsibidi signs relate to love, warfare and sacred concerns that are kept secret. Nsibidi literally means cruel letter, which represent the very depth of the ancient Ejagham and Efik societies. Nsibidi was separated into a religious form and a more ornamental public version before the British annexation of the area. In addition, with colonizing aspects like Western education and Christian dogma, the number of persons literate in Nsibidi significantly dropped. Secret society members were among the last to be literate in the symbols (Slogar, 2005, p.155).

The researcher knowledge of Nsibidi cultural symbols started developing in 2015, 28th December precisely when Nsibidi was used as motif on textiles fabrics and costumes for Calabar carnival which is the biggest street party in Africa. One of the carnival band known as passion four emerged the winner due to the display of the Nsibidi cultural symbols used for their costumes. After the carnival celebration, television channels engaged in a discourse with some traditional rulers about Nsibidi symbols being part of the carnival celebration. The traditional rulers expressed their excitement seeing Nsibidi culture being part of the present generation, as the symbols relates to their history, development and philosophy of the Ejagham and Efik people of Cross River State in Nigeria. To build-up my knowledge further after listening to Nsibidi moral values being discussed on television by some Efik counsel of chief, I started reading books that contains Nsibidi symbols and visited the old Calabar museum in search of objects with Nsibidi inscription. Using evidence gathered from my visit to the old Calabar museum where only broken terracotta pieces with Nsibidi symbols was found,

is what inspired my ceramics practice into committing Nsibidi symbols to a longevity material for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural heritage.

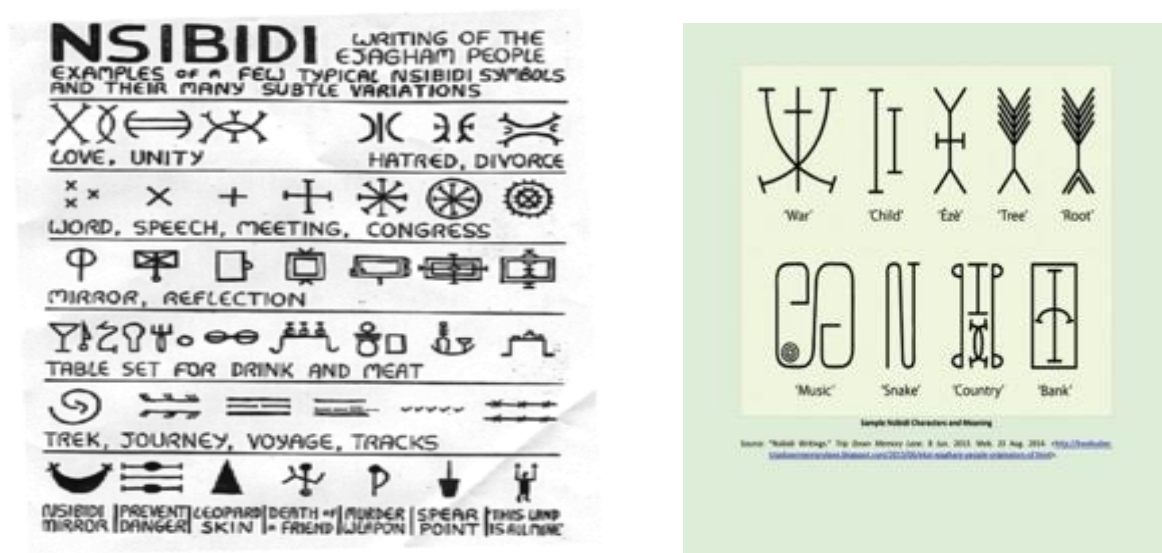


Figure 19: Nsibidi Ideograms

Source: Nsibidi writings. downmemorylane.blogspot.com/2019

2.8 NIGERIA SETTINGS

Nigeria is a country on Africa's west coast (see Fig. 21). Its topography is diversified and the weather ranges from dry to wet. Nigeria's people, however, are the most varied characteristically. There are hundreds of languages in the country, among them: Yoruba, Igbo, Fula, Hausa, Edo, Ibibio, Tiv and English. It borders Niger to the north; Niger, Chad and Cameroon to the east; the Atlantic Ocean Gulf to the south; and Benin to the west.

In Nigeria there are over 250 ethnic groupings. Each one lives in a territory which, via initial settlement and legacy, they perceive to be their own. Nigeria has three large language groups: the Nigeri-Congo languages, the Nilo-Sahara languages and the Afro-Asiatic languages (Falola, 1999, p.34). Cross River in southern Nigeria (see Fig. 22) is an area in which Nsibidi symbols came from the eastern borders of Cameroon.

Its capital is Calabar, and the name comes from the state's Cross River (Oyono). The main foreign languages in the state are English and French, whereas the major Indigenous languages of the country are Bekwarra, Bette, Ejagham and Efik. Ejagham remains the major ethnic group in the north and south of the Senate constituency to Cross River. The state (Cross River) has an area size of 20,156 km².

It shares borders with Benue in the north; Ebonyi and Abia in the west; with Ambazonia and Cameroon in the east; with Akwa-Ibom in the west; and the Atlantic Ocean in the south. The population of the state is estimated at approximately 2.89 million (2006) and has a rich, unique cultural heritage (Philippiano, Julius, 2016).



Figure 20: Map of Nigeria
Source: Bayelsa state portals
Year: 2015

available literature to demonstrate Greek ceramic cultural surface expression movement through time, which is evidence-based and a valid route to positioning my ceramic practice for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural symbols.

Furthermore, exploring Nsibidi as surface decoration on a new ceramic form is an important direction, as this is currently lacking in contemporary Nigerian ceramics practice; and the contextual review suggests that this research project is relevant to the field of study. The chapter establishes the development of Nigerian arts and shows how British pottery practice influenced and developed Nigerian pottery. There is, however, still a void in the field of Nsibidi and conceived ceramic form, for Nsibidi cultural preservation, which this research aims to fill. The next chapter will discuss cultural preservation and globalisation effects on cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL PRESERVATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on how preservation of culture could occur in a variety of ways, with possible factors for cultural preservation through art practices. Based on the particularity of the research being in the UK, with Nigerian experience and Nsibidi cultural symbols, as such it is important to explore globalisation and how it has affected cultural preservation.

3.1 CULTURAL PRACTICES

Culture is the product of man's inventive practices, which has been preserved and passed down over centuries of human society. It is limited to human-created things and philosophies (Omekwu, 2006, p.247) and is defined as the collection of people's favourite arts, traditions, festivals, sacred or worship places, norms, beliefs, philosophies, dress and dress styles, traditional monuments and architectures, technology and other objects that are treasured and preserved for historical, educational, recreational and religious reasons, among others (Onyima, 2016).

In this study, culture is therefore a summation of a society's material and non-material patterns passed down over centuries, and Nigeria is one of these countries with a rich and diverse cultural heritage called Nsibidi symbols (Aremu, 2008, p.192).

The value of heritages to countries around the world, including developing countries like Nigeria, cannot be overstated. This is due to their importance in terms of history, tourism, aesthetics, education, economics and science. Heritages are treasured aspects of a culture that are passed on from generation to generation for preservation. They are the historical, cultural, leisure and economic wealth of extinct and current civilizations that are preserved and passed on from generation to generation (Kennedy 1992, p. 12).

To put it another way, heritages are important gifts from humans and nature. The above can classify heritages into two different sorts based on their origins: ecological/natural heritage and cultural heritage (Oruche, 1992, p. 108). Both sorts of heritage are available to Nigeria.

Ecological heritages are natural areas that have been protected for the purpose of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery they offer. Their geomorphic characteristics (caves, rivers, lakes, mountains, hills and cataracts) also comprise wild vegetation, animals, and fauna (Duke in Aremu, 2008; Eluyemi, 2016 p.122). This research focuses on the second category indicated above, i.e. of cultural heritage. The ecological legacy is outside the scope of this investigation.

Onyima (2016) defines cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible qualities passed down from generation to generation, protected in the present, and bequeathed for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritages emerge from man's inventive practices and are preserved and transmitted through generations of human societies by oral traditions or written concrete types (Okpoko, 1992). Nsibidi cultural symbols are grouped as a written substantive type.

Written tradition has proved to be a useful instrument to professionals like the archaeologists and ethnographers in locating and identifying cultural heritage sites/areas for further study and preservation (Onyima, 2016).

Preservation is described by Onyima as 'the promotion of cultural property, whether of a tangible or intangible nature, whether past or present, written or unwritten'; and he added that identification (suitable registration) and correct storage of cultural relics, whether in private hands or in museums, are also part of preservation (Onyima, 2016, p.165).

Preservation is important, because it promotes old ways of living that are still relevant today. Arguably, the past is the key to the present and the platform for the future. The preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages can be best summarized in three dimensions: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. During the pre-colonial period, rulers, heads of families and others maintained Nigerian cultural heritages in royal palaces of tribal kingdoms and empires, among others, such as kindred, deity priests in possession of shrines and holy groves (Fasuyi, 1973 p. 21).

For example, the preservation of Nigeria's cultural legacy is jeopardized due to ineffective efforts at preservation and conservation (Carlson, 2003 p.93).

Efforts to preserve these heritages are hampered by daunting challenges, particularly human activities such as trafficking and exportation of Nigerian art, museum thefts and looting, vandalism, iconoclasm, religion, civilization, commerce, change and development projects, as well as the era when missionaries introduced Christianity, which relegated and downplayed Nigerian traditional heritage (Onyima, 2016).

As a result of an avalanche of opportunities generated from an appropriately protected cultural heritage, the clarion call for cultural preservation is required for a mindful preservation of Nsibidi cultural heritages through my pottery activity; and it should not be ignored.

Though the damage of colonialism on Nigerian Art and culture in the 19th and 20th century impacted on Nigerian Art. African cultures never existed in isolation, there was always a movement, trade, and the exchange of ideas. Logically, Nigerian art is dynamic and has changed in form, function, and meaning over time. The concepts/themes, the methods, styles, materials/ media of execution of the visual arts practices keep changing because of the emergence of socio-cultural, religious, technological, and modern influences. In the academia, there exists the concept of “traditional” African art. Usually this refers to “indigenous Art traditions that were viable and active prior to the colonization of Africa by European powers in the late nineteenth century. Implicit in the use of the word traditional is the assumption that the art which it describes is static and unchanging (Perani and Smith, 1998, P.43).

The pre-colonial era was the period before the advent of Europeans to the soil of Africa. The visual arts practices in Nigeria during this period can be traced to the artistic heritage of the nation spanning from 200 BC to AD 1900. These artistic visual histories existed in forms of Nok culture, Igbo Ukwu culture, Ife art, Benin art, Mbari culture among others (Ngumah, 2010, p. 1). These art forms have no traceable authorship except by cultural decent for instance, the Nok-terra cotta refers to the art culture of the Northern part of Nigeria, while Igbo-Ukwu and Mbari art refer to the cultures of the Igbos in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Other art cultures based on ethnic inclination include Benin art, Ife art, Ibeji among the Yorubas of Western Nigeria. These art forms have remained the art treasures of Nigeria and they are also known beyond the shores of Nigeria. These traditional art forms in various distinct areas and rendered in different

media served our people socially, politically, religiously, economically and aesthetically. The media of execution included wood, stone, clay, mud, bronze and indigenous colours for painting (body adornment and wall decoration). The techniques of production were carving (subtractive) using their own form of tools such as adze fashioned by the blacksmiths, modelling (additive) using mainly improvised tools, and lost-wax technique for their bronze casting. Stylistically, the art forms were highly expressive and tend towards naturalism. However, some of the art forms which were mainly sculpture were geometric and elongated like the 'Ikenga' and 'Ibeji' icons. The traditional phase of Nigerian visual arts history experienced a lot of crafts such as carving, pottery, weaving, and blacksmithing, among others. The creative skills for learning and producing traditional art forms were acquired through informal method, referred to as apprenticeship system (Ngumah, 2010, P 1).

Emeji opined that through the apprenticeship system the "traditional artists, designers, craftsmen, for example were introduced to art instruction very early in life as art which also served as a family trade" (2001, P. 102).

The traditional artists were highly skilled and culturally inspired and also very devoted to the creative calling. However, the artists predominately carvers and bronze casters depended wholly on commissioned works and thus, combined their creations with other preoccupations such as farming, hunting, and fishing (Crowder 2006, P. 69).

These traditional art works were original in nature and were produced according to the dictates of the people/ community and not by the artist's initiative; the works were unadulterated and highly functional. According to Aniakor "traditional art creations were institutionally guided" (2006, P.120). The creative energies of this phase of Nigerian art tagged traditional were produced by our forefathers based on their cultural pattern and trans-massively handed over to us.

In the 19th and 20th century, Nigeria was under the administration of imperialist leaders of Europe. The country experienced a lot of changes in her scheme of things particularly in her art creation and cultural practices. This is because of the implantation of a new art culture which was formally introduced in secondary schools in Nigeria by Aina Onabolu in the early 1920s. In attempt to be part of the new art direction in Nigeria, some traditional artists' creative efforts acquired modern influences. Such works were neither traditional nor modern; they tend to be a combination of traditional and modern influences as well as practices (Nkrumeh, 2002,

p. 136). At the threshold of the colonial period most traditional artists were in dilemma whether to continue art practice as a means of livelihood or to look for another source of income. This is because the artists were de-patronized due to the introduction of Christianity – a new religious faith. The strict adherents of the new faith became allergic to carving images that were branded “fetish”, “primitive” and other irritating names of their fancy. Some of the visual arts practices observable in this period are painting, sculpture, pottery and crafts (Perani and Smith, 1999, p.14).

Painting as an important visual art experience became prominent during the colonial period in Nigeria compared to its minimal position in the pre-colonial period. The type of painting that existed during the pre-colonial phase was uli design-body adornment and wall decoration among the Igbos (Nkrumeh, 2002, p.133).

Nevertheless, many collectors and museum professionals place far greater value on African objects created prior to colonization. For them, pre-colonial objects have an aura of an untainted, timeless past when artists only made artworks for their own communities unaffected by the outside world. These objects are too often seen in opposition to work produced today using Western materials and conventions by artists who are engaged in a global discourse and who make works of art to be sold.

3.2 CULTURAL PRESERVATION THROUGH ART

Nigeria possesses a rich culture that is shaped by its ethnic groups. There is no doubt she is endowed with great cultural heritage, which needs to be adequately documented. In attempts to achieve this, many scholars/art practitioners strive to document their cultural heritage through art practices. Efforts at preserving these cultures are exhibited through art practice by scholars/art practitioners, such as Victor Ekpuk of Nigeria on Nsibidi; El Anatsui of Ghana on Adinkra and Nsetip on Mbopo; Nnochiri on the ukara cloth of Nsibidi, which he appropriated into textile design; among other artists that have engaged uli culture in their creative production (Okpoko, 2011, p.102).

Sloger highlighted the role art plays in the preservation of cultural patterns: that art preserves a people's cultural history, and that art fulfils this vital role through the numerous art pieces that express the worth of such culture (Sloger, 2007, p.32).

In the same vein, Nkusi added that history and culture is not most probable in written traditions and tales of the past but can be conveyed through contemporary art practice (Nkusi, 2013, p. 89). The study revealed that art is a human activity, which means it is a special kind of knowledge about culture that gives an insight into past and current events. This literature connotes that art can serve as tool for the promotion and preservation of culture, on which this study is based.

According to Clarke (2016), artworks convey fundamental and significant features of the societies in which they were developed. Art works therefore, serve the purpose of communicating the cultural values of a society to the audience. This suggests that artworks that possess some cultural values tend to radiate the rich cultural values of that society in which the artworks are created.

Nsetip (2006) also added that African traditional society is anchored on beliefs, social order, norms and several practices, which are of truth and must be given foundational rites of passage. This empowerment is usually through visual interpretation, which may reflect in several forms of art, ranging from dance, music, folklore, etc., most often the interpretations are engaged to demonstrate and highlight social demeanour and decorum, as it is mirrored in the thought and beliefs of the special cherished culture of the people. This therefore posits that art forms can become a tool for the interpretation

and preservation of some vital cultural aspects of a society. This is reflected in Nsentip (2006), in his attempt to preserve the Mbopo culture through the production of some ceramic wares bearing the symbols of the prestigious Mbopo culture of the Ibibios in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Nsentip, 2006 p.2).

Art practice can be rooted in history and is a catalyst for change in a culture. This is because it connects people of a culture to their past, and it suggests new ideas and insights. To this end, Ogundele (2014) asserted that art offered a foundation for discussing the necessity to preserve a people's culture. The works of Eziafo Okaro highlight the trans-epochal qualities of her work in Uli, which is common among the Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria (see section 3.2, Fig. 22). Their submissions to cultural practice revealed that the works embedded in Uli reinforce and preserve the Igbo identity and Uli traditional design, which is inspired from Nsibidi (Ogundele, 2014, p. 187).

Uli (Uri) are curved traditional motifs created by the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria. These designs are mostly abstract, consisting of linear lines and geometric shapes, with some figurative components. Traditionally, these are either dyed onto the flesh or painted as murals on the sides of buildings.

Designs are typically asymmetrical and are frequently painted on the spur of the moment. Uli is not commonly considered sacrosanct, apart from images painted on the walls of shrines and constructed in accordance with certain communal rites.

Furthermore, uli is not explicitly symbolic, but rather focuses on creating a visual effect and designing the patron's body or buildings. Uli sketching was formerly practiced throughout most of Igboland, but by 1970 it had lost much of its prominence and was only being maintained alive by a small group of current painters. However, uli is still performed by some Nigerian artists, some of whom have begun making traditional motifs on canvas.

Additionally, contemporary artists, such as the Nsukka group, have copied uli themes and aesthetics and adapted them into various media, frequently merging these with other styles from both Nigeria and Europe (Willis, 1989, pp.62-64).



Figure 22: Uli wall painting 1986

Medium: Oil colour on the wall

Source: Tobijulo Onifade

Year 2020.

3.3 POSSIBLE FACTORS FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Culture protection and preservation encompasses human rights, tolerance, development and the preservation of cultural landmarks and artifacts, as well as intellectual property rights for culturally specific language and art (Thomas-Hoffman, 2015).

One of the pillars upon which the United Nations was founded was the protection and preservation of the world's different cultures. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the UN's primary body for cultural protection and preservation. (UNESCO 2004).

The goal of preserving culture is to ensure that future generations may access it. People would struggle to learn from previous generations if they did not have access to cultural heritage. As a result, considerations for cultural preservation and accessibility of cultural values remain a major challenge. The majority of artifacts and collections from outstanding cultures are on display in museums and galleries around the world. This is due to the fact that they were purposefully kept for the sake of information and reference, as well as the huge potential for tourism to help the country's economy.

MUSEUMS

A museum is a cultural and educational institution that collects, analyses, exhibits, and preserves artifacts or artifacts (Okpoko, 2011, p.4). Museums and galleries remain important in their traditional role of conservation, where they attract large publics by creating exhibitions and events, which bring in a massive turnover for artists' works and preservation.

Museums are important institutions with the duty of nurturing, safeguarding and faithfully handing down artifacts or historical stories from one generation to the next, i.e. the pride of the people in relation to their cultural heritage and way of life.

It is necessary to remember that a country or its people cannot survive, unless their cultural legacy and territorial integrity are preserved, because culture is the people's way of life (Okpoko, 1992, p.89). Museums are more than just structures; the substance of a museum is the people's history. Looking into the role of museums in the preservation of national heritage shows unequivocally that without preservation, a nation's cultural heritage is lost, and we need this heritage as a country or tribe, and therefore the indispensability of museums cannot be overstated.

The Nigeria National Museum, located in the city of Lagos, has a notable collection of Nigerian art, including pieces of statuary, carving, masks, terracotta human heads, part of the Nok culture and the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes. The Nike art gallery is a private gallery, owned by Nike Davies- Okundaye and located in Lagos, with over 7000 diverse artworks from various Nigerian contemporary artists; but neither of these holds ceramic artifacts on Nsibidi cultural symbols. Both art centres are the hidden treasures of Nigeria.

During this study, it was necessary for the researcher to visit the British Museum as part of gathering data. During the visit in 2019, collection care managers Ana Carreira and James Hamill made available artworks with Nsibidi inscription with documented information to the inquirer. Most of the artifacts located in the British Museum, were calabash vessels covered with Nsibidi characters and other decoration in black from Africa- Nigeria, donated by Percy Talbot, Elphinstone Dayrell and other art collectors. Most of the art pieces came to the British Museum in July 1916 and were later registered in the 1950s. The artists and the process of making the artworks are not known, and the reasons and motivation for the collections of the artifacts are not documented. Some objects appear to be repaired before they came into the museum, but the repairer is unknown. Most pieces were bought on sales from an event in the course of travelling, though some vital information is missing due to the lack of a data-based system at the time when the artworks were donated to the museum. The Nsibidi surface decoration on the calabash pieces found in the British Museum was only identified when I came in contact with the calabash objects. The Nsibidi symbols in Fig. 23 were symbols for war, tree and root; while Fig. 24 shows Nsibidi symbols for love, meeting and Nsibidi mirror; and Fig, 25 shows the Nsibidi symbol for love.

The Nsibidi symbols on the calabash surfaces were composited on all the pieces, therefore for a clearer identification of each symbol, see Fig. 19 in section 2.7.

The research has adapted Nisibidi cultural symbols into its ceramic practice and documented every process used to achieve the ceramic artifacts. The research artifacts will be preserved in museums and galleries for international awareness and cultural preservation purposes.



Figure 23. Title: Bowl with cover

Year collected: 1916.

Donated by: Elphinstone Dayrell

Height – 7.3cm, width – 37.3cm, depth – 13.2cm

Location: British Museum



Figure 24. Title: Vessel from Southern Nigeria – Ekoi

Year collected: 1950.

Donated by Percy Talbot

Height – 13.6cm, width – 18.7cm, depth – 19cm

Location: British Museum



Figure 25. Title: Dish with cover from Southern Nigeria – Ekoi

Year collected: 1950.

Donated by Percy Talbot

Both dimensions, Height – 21.4cm, width – 22.1cm, Depth – 21.4cm

Location: British Museum

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRY

This is an industry whose purpose is to preserve cultures, including tangible and intangible culture. The three main parties involved in cultural preservation through creative industry are the Government, educational institutions and society. The industry is classified into the following fields: advertising, crafts, film, music, performing art, publishing, design and symbols, software and computer services, Art and the antiques market, etc. The creative sector has both dynamic and static economic worth; it has long contributed to the process of economic growth and cultural preservation development. (UNESCO 2005).

INTERNET

The internet offers the greatest opportunities for cultures to be preserved. Images of cultural artifacts can be captured using digital cameras and scanners, and then imported into computer systems and uploaded to the internet (Conway 2000). Conway added that some of the benefits of the internet are that information and content are delivered directly to the end user who downloads large amounts of information simultaneously; and paper-based information on artifacts migrate in electronical format to any part of the world, where this data can be edited, printed and saved for generations.

The internet aided the researcher to access other cultures from different parts of the world. The internet has played a vital role in the literature search for this study, providing information on different cultures as it relates to the study for reference purposes. Articles and books were sourced from Google Scholar with the internet search engine.

MEDIA AND ART

Digital storage has played a significant role in cultural heritage preservation. It has permitted the global exchange of cultural and historical information and is not only the most popular way of archiving, but is also the future trend (Chen, 2012, p.3). Through these media, people express themselves artistically and creatively in a number of ways, including formal theatrical performances, sculptures, painting, ceramics, textiles and building, as well as less formal arts, music, and food festivals, celebrations, casual cultural gatherings and crafts clubs. These formal and informal, physical and invisible professional artist and cultural activities establish a community of cultural assets when combined. These activities, which include a wide range of spaces, locations, levels of professionalism and participation, art products, artists and events, are critical to a community's overall well-being, economic and cultural vitality, sense of identity and legacy (Conway 2000). Using the art of ceramics practice as a tool to preserve Nsibidi cultural symbols keeps the culture alive, because for that to happen, they must remain relevant to a culture and be regularly practised. Nsibidi cultural symbols are significant due to their moral value, which creates a certain emotion within the researcher; and these feelings remind her that she belongs to a country, a tradition and a way of life. Therefore, Nsibidi cultural awareness is essential, and should be learned within communities and between generations for the purpose of preservation.

3.4 ART FORM AS A PRACTICAL MEDIUM FOR NSIBIDI PRESERVATION

In every culture and time, there is evidence of human passion and the quest for psychological and aesthetical satisfaction. Traditional African culture provides socially accepted methods and materials used to satisfy humans' emotional and other passionate desires. It is true that no work is created from a vacuum; there is always an influence or inspiration drawn from natural or man-made art forms. The creative inspiration could come from existing contemporary or traditional art (Okpara, 2008).

Nsibidi symbols provide a rich culture and have a lot of artistic potential that can be explored and adapted for creative production.

Early evidence of Nsibidi is found in the decoration of the carved monoliths of Emangebe, near Ikom in the upper Cross River region in Nigeria. The stones carefully display a rendered concentric circle, spirals and lines, all connected to Nsibidi symbols. These lines, circles and spirals radiate beauty on the monoliths, which means there is the possibility that one can infuse these lines into a creative production with any available materials (Lekan, 2017, p.7).



Figure 26. Title: Ikom monolith
Location: Ikom Local Govt C.R.S. - Nigeria
Source: Calabar Museum
Year 2010

3.5 THE EFFECT OF GLOBALIZATION ON CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Globalisation is defined as an 'increasing integration of world economies, including the movement toward trade' (Mankiw, 2007, p.192). Giddens (1990) in Georgantzas, Katsamakos and Solowiej (2009) also defines globalisation as a global strengthening of social relations, connecting distant locales, so that local events are shaped by events occurring a few kilometres away, and vice versa.

There are different ways of analysing and understanding globalisation; it can be cultural, political and economic. This study focuses on cultural globalisation; global culture is a part of globalisation that has not only brought the good aspects of economic and social development from other countries but has also led to changes in the culture of host communities.

The issue of cultural preservation relates to cultural globalisation, as defined by Ritzer (2011): a process whereby the world is becoming interconnected, a connection between people, government and cultures coming together to make a change. Ritzer added that cultural differentialism is a culture that has a lasting difference and is mostly unaffected by globalisation; while cultural convergence is based on the idea of globalisation, leading to increasing sameness throughout the world. It is, however, a contradictory process, whereby globalization is a means of connecting countries together, but cultural practices vary from culture to culture (Ritzer, 2011). Globalisation has brought about the acknowledgement of law and order, as it relates to each community as a global concept used in every culture, which means the change in culture sometimes is because of globalisation (Pieterse 2019, p.121).

Globalizations enhance cultural identity; the distinctiveness and peculiarity of their culture grow considerably more concerned. Cultural identity offers local knowledge and feeling of self, community and nation, with a global relevance (Deng, 2005, p.39). Levine (2011) also observed that cultural diversity and globalization enhances existing culture but cautioned that we must not lose sight, when adopting other cultures, of the need for our indigenous culture to survive at all costs (Levine, 2011 p.1).

Globalization has both negative and positive impacts on cultural preservation (Akande 2002).

In terms of its positive impact, globalization gives the opportunity to broaden one's horizons and to get to know other cultures; globalization brings more diversity and helps us to understand that everyone is unique. In a media-led society that pluralizes the world by recognizing the capacity and value of one's culture, globalization strengthens individual power. Another positive effect of globalization is that human rights are universal and guaranteed by law; the internet enables one to be informed and interwoven with each other's culture (Chen 2001 p.8).

On the other hand, globalization also has a negative impact on cultural preservation. One of its negative effects is the movement of people and cultures to other countries, thereby affecting their cultural identity and practice in a particular manner which is different from their way of life and their country of birth (Hock-Tong, 2001). Another aspect is religion: people from different countries, with different cultural values trying to integrate with cultures which are not related. For example, what was an attribute of cultural worship as a way of life in Nigeria has been abandoned due to Christianity. The arrival of Christianity has also depopulated the traditional religions adhered to in many parts of world, most especially Nigeria (Nwegbu, Eze and Asogwa, 2011).

Western adventures because of globalization made efforts to undermine the cultural heritage through colonization and imperialism, leading to a state of cultural disorientation (Kalu, 1980, p.92).

Globalization is accused of causing certain cultural practices to disappear (Crystal, 2002, p.64). People have struggled to preserve their language, art and religion, while the newest generation, as they enter the socio-economic system of the dominant culture, is losing its cultural identity. For diverse groups, therefore, it is crucial to support intercultural communication and promote mutual tolerance for other lifestyles in the preservation of cultural diversity as globalization spreads.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an overview of the preservation of cultural heritage in the world at large, and specifically of Nsibidi cultural symbols in Nigeria, narrating the dimensions and efforts towards preservation, highlighting challenges and the prospects, if myriads of cultural heritages are to be preserved. In the art sector, it is essential for cultural heritages to be appreciated and inculcated into younger generations' schools: subjects concerning cultural heritage should be introduced to give a balance to the past and the future, in order to help provide coming generations with a clue to their history and to help with innovation. Seeing what we can make today by jointly taking clues from yesterday's challenges is better, as there is no future without a past. Fine artists should be encouraged to produce works that have media and techniques interwoven with cultural history: that way, history becomes movable from generation to generation, leaving historical cultural heritage in our daily activities as part of everyday life. Exhibitions and museums should be structured systematically to foster collaborations amongst artists and other governmental and non-governmental bodies to encourage better preservation of cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the case studies that have been conducted in relation to research aim 1, in order to aid the positioning of the research in the contemporary area of practice. The justification for the case studies has been established, and the following sub-headings will be covered in this chapter: Contemporary artists working in ceramics form, as well as Contemporary artists working with Nsibidi traditional symbols. Finally, the chapter is summarized, and the information learned is presented.

4.1 RATIONALE FOR THE CASE STUDY

Case studies, as outlined by Gray and Malins, are a significant technique for connecting research to the current field (Gray and Malins, 2004, p. 117). A case study is typically used when the researcher wishes to thoroughly analyze a subject inside a specific setting or to comprehend a specific occurrence based on observations that are related by a similarity (Rowley 2002, p.12).

Multiple data gathering methods and sources are triangulated in this study to create a thorough picture of the situation. The case study draws information from a wide range of sources, including interviews, papers, artifacts and observations. The ceramic art forms and surface exploration of Nsibidi cultural symbols are discussed in Chapter 5, and these have been inspired and developed based on the works of contemporary artists Magdalene Odundo and Victor Ekpuk. In Chapter 1, a short overview was written about each artist (see p.25). However, it was decided that a more in-depth study of the artist would be more beneficial to this research, in order to position the artworks within the field.

4.2 THE APPROACH TAKEN TO THE CASE STUDIES

Two artists were chosen and examined to represent a diverse range of perspectives in the subject; the artists are well-known for their work in ceramics, graphics and painting. Their methodologies vary, as does the manner of their works. The approach to the case study began with an initial inquiry (see Appendices 2 & 3) that was created and delivered to both artists. Due to certain constraints of the research (the pandemic, which led to lockdown and restricted people from travelling or meeting with other households), it was not possible to visit artists' studios; however, the researcher visited the British Museum, where Magdalene's works were displayed, and the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery in West Yorkshire, where she held her exhibition in 2019, to experience her work first-hand. This provided a practical insight into the artists' technique, while also addressing some interesting questions with ceramics finished surfaces (burnished).

The questions for Magdalene Odundo (who is the first case-study) formed the basic inspiration for the exploration of ceramic forms for the study; the second set of questions, for Victor Ekpuk, were devised to gain a more in-depth knowledge about Nsibidi cultural symbols. Similar questions were initially posted to each artist with a view to a possible structure for the case studies, as well as establishing the parameters of the field under inquiry (ceramics, graphic and painting). The case study questions conducted for the artists included research questions, aims and a brief introduction to the research, in relation to the research objectives; to assist also in the placement of the research within the contemporary area of practice.

4.3 MAGDALENE ODUNDO



Figure 27 Title: Magdalene Odundo picture

Source: Financial times

Year: 2020

Magdalene Odundo was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and attended school in both India and Kenya. She studied Graphics and Commercial Art at the Kabete National Polytechnic in Kenya before moving to England in 1971, to pursue her chosen career in graphic design. Magdalene acquired her foundation art and graphics credentials at the Cambridge College of Art (Odundo, 2019, p.13).

Odundo discovered pottery after living in England for a period, and in 1974–75 she travelled to Nigeria, where she visited the Pottery Training Centre in Abuja, and Kenya to study traditional hand-built pottery techniques (Spring, 2008). She also visited San Ildefonso Pueblo in New Mexico to study the production of black-burnished vessels. Odundo graduated from West Surrey College of Art & Design (now part of the University for the Creative Arts) with a BA in 1976. She then pursued a master's degree at London's Royal College of Art.

She taught at the Commonwealth Institute in London from 1976 to 1979 and at the Royal College of Art, also in London, from 1979 to 1982, before returning to Surrey Institute of Art & Design (now also part of the University for the Creative Arts) in 1997, where she was appointed Professor of Ceramics in 2001. In March 2016, she was named Emeritus Professor at the University for the Creative Arts, with a celebration ceremony conducted at the Farnham campus against the backdrop of her seminal glass sculpture, *Transition II*. She currently resides and works in Surrey.

Odundo's most well-known ceramics are handcrafted with a coiling technique. Each piece is burnished, slip-covered, and then burnished again. The pieces are burnt in an oxidizing environment, resulting in a red-orange colour. Many of the vessels created by Odundo are reminiscent of the human form, often following the curves of the spine and stomach. Furthermore, the shape of expression of her vessels are symbolic of the female body; one of her most famous pieces is a black and ochre vessel with a curved base and elongated neck resembling the form of a pregnant woman.

Magdalene remains one of the most influential figures perhaps to emerge during the flourishing of British studio ceramics in the 1980s. Within the narrative approach, her work contributed to reshaping and enriching self-expressive forms regarded as Art. Odundo's works were made in Britain but shaped by a global outlook; her work pushes against any attempts to define it geographically: instead, it speaks in a language that transcends place and time (Odundo, 2020, p.2). A second burning in an oxygen-depleted (reducing) atmosphere leads the clay to turn black (Birmingham Museum of Art, 2010). She employs techniques similar to those employed by the Ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as drawing influence from places such as China and Mexico. Her graphic design talents have remained with her, as she frequently sketches her interest in natural shapes and form design, to assist her with her ceramic creations (Odundo, 2019).

Magdalene's love of drawing is fundamental to her practice, as everyday sketches capture observations, details of things and bodily motions, many of which turn into ideas for her ceramics works. Odundo's burgeoning interest in producing was satiated by her research of the collections of Cambridge's many museums, which provided her with the opportunity to study the art of global cultures.

In Cambridge, Odundo was also exposed to the art of European modernism and, as the global history of objects became more accessible to her, she resolved to create works that connect specifically with the setting of post-colonial philosophy. Odundo's early experiences exposed her to cultures and motifs that she eventually used to shape her own work. This early encounter with artifacts from around the world shaped Odundo's understanding of their role in connecting objects intimately to human experience and sparked the start of an intellectual journey guided by her fascination with the innate power of objects to tell the stories of the people who made them. The studio visits to artists like Bernard Leach, whom Odundo visited on a class trip in 1974, were eye-opening for Odundo. Leach's relationship with Japan and the importance of cross-cultural exchange in information about his language resonated with Odundo, as she increasingly came to think about her own role as a maker, and as an African artist learning her craft in the UK (Jegede, 2000 p.21). Michael Cardew also influenced Odundo. Cardew urged her to visit his pottery training centre in Abuja, Nigeria, where he taught her all aspects of throwing and hand-building, as well as how to pack and fire the kiln. He emphasized the importance of Odundo studying African cultures and pot-making practices alongside Ladi Kwali (Odundo, 2019, p.56).

Odundo's works reflected elements of the various ceramic traditions that she had been exploring. She sought to learn and refine her own language by emulating the work of both historical and contemporary makers. Her work 'The journey of things' clearly demonstrates the influence of Odundo's time studying in Nigeria. Its rounded, earthenware form is inscribed with linear geometric markings reminiscent of those employed by Ladi Kwali and the Abuja potters, as well as the decoration found on the pots made by the Nupe community in central Nigeria. Although Odundo was still experimenting with throwing and slip decoration, it was hand-building that increasingly became her preferred way of making, though she continued to explore a variety of approaches to the method. For Odundo, each work originates with a ball of clay, which she gradually hollows out and pulls upwards to create the walls of the pot. During her two-month residency at Abuja, she worked with all of the potters at the centre, honing her throwing talents and, more importantly, learning how to hand-build using traditional Gbari methods.

At Abuja training center, hand-building was historically practiced by female potters, and Odundo was taught by Ladi Kwali, which Odundo acknowledges had an impact on her last year at the Royal College of Art (Odundo, 2019, p.26). Short lengths of flattened clay are employed to increase the height of the structure, while gourd scrapers are used to smooth its inner and exterior surfaces. Odundo discovers the unique character of each work as it rises, as she manipulates the clay, contracting and extending its walls to create her trademark silhouettes. Odundo's hand-building technique involves her moving around the sculpture, shaping each component of its form; a symbiotic link develops between Odundo's own bodily movements and the dance of the clay within her fingers. Odundo typically draws the forms she intends to define before beginning, but she also lets the material lead her, following fortuitous divergences that give her pot a living, breathing character. (Odundo, 2019 p.29).



Figure 28: Magdalene Odundo's Pot
Untitled, burnished, and carbonised
terracotta
Source: The Journey of Things
Year: 1988



Figure 29: Magdalene Odundo's Pot
Title: Asymmetrical reduced black piece
Source: The Journey of Things
Year: 1992

4.4 THE CONVERSATION WITH MAGDALENE ODUNDO

To have an in-depth knowledge of Magdalene Odundo's studio practice, which has inspired and informed the new ceramic form (see chapter 5) in my research, further case study questions were generated and emailed to her (see appendix 2 for complete interview). The interview with Odundo, as stated in appendix 1, was informative to my research practice. The first part of the interview aligned with the research aims (see aim 1 in Chapter 1). It also gave me an opportunity to know her cultural background, and to know if her work is informed by certain concepts or themes from her background, childhood, socio- economic status, where she lived or was raised, because most often our cultural experience informs our practice. Odundo revealed that growing up in Kenya, being educated in India, and presently living in the UK has influenced the work that she has made over the last 40 years, and her works communicate the historical continuity of what makes objects part of a human expression.

In describing her experiences in creating works, Odundo unveiled her methods and techniques of pottery production, as she refers to her work being widely documented in a book titled 'The Journey of Things' by Magdalene Odundo. More fundamentally, the engagement with Odundo's pottery-making techniques facilitated the gradual process of achieving the new ceramic form and burnishing surface, as these were in line with the research questions to investigate what ceramics production methods or creative techniques can be used for the conceptualization of forms which serve as a vehicle for Nsibidi cultural preservation (see question 3 in Chapter 1). Odundo's approach to ceramics exploration of forms has influenced my practice, as every artist has a handful of other artists they look up to for inspiration and guidance. Odundo affirms that her biggest influence in her works is historical: antiquities, and early works. This is because she is fascinated by the cycle of life, especially that of human beings. She added that she is fascinated by ritual and ceremonies that are attached to birth, youth, marriage, death and funerals. 'This is so well displayed through archaeological discoveries, and contemporary and social anthropology, these rituals are also universal and exemplified in all living creatures, practically all living species practice rites and rituals around life cycle stages' (Odundo, interview 2020).

The research fed directly from Odundo's unique pottery making and the information she disclosed. The interview question with regard to how Odundo's living and working in the UK has shaped her practice and what is the effect of her cultural identity on her artistic development, corresponds with the research question (see question 4 in chapter 1). This question was an eye-opener, as by this point, I started thinking about the various possible ways of portraying ceramic forms towards reflecting cross-cultural practices.

This is relevant, as I am undertaking research and creating artwork in the UK, and to my role as an African maker/artist. Odundo responded that making work in clay and establishing herself as a ceramic artist has enabled her to strengthen her cultural identity. She revealed that clay has been a very positive experience for her. She frequently sketches her interest in natural forms and design to aid in the exploration of similar ceramics forms of base and elongated neck.

Her fascination with the historical and with life - cycles as discussed in section 4.4, p.91 is well displayed through archaeological discoveries, which is parallel to Nsibidi ancient cultural symbolism, which the study addresses. It is apparent that Magdalene Odundo's approach to ceramics exploration of forms is the closest to this study. In comparing the visual form style of Magdalene and my own works, they are somewhat distinct; yet the approach and thoughts are pretty similar to her practical and technical approach of producing unique ceramics curves and are significant to this study; and the visual aesthetic of the uniform ceramics forms has inspired the creation of the new ceramics form which this research presents in Chapter 5.

4.5 VICTOR EKPUK:



Figure 30. Title: Victor Ekpuk picture

Source: The African center

Year: 2020

Victor Ekpuk is a Nigerian-born artist from Ibibio in Akwa Ibom State's Eket local government area. He is presently based in Washington, D.C, USA. Victor received his Bachelor of Fine Art degree in 1989 from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in south-Western Nigeria, where he initially examined Nsibidi's aesthetic principles. Ekpuk is internationally known for his paintings, drawing and sculptures, which reimagine the ancient communication system Nsibidi, to create his own unique language of abstraction that speaks a global hybrid language (Ekpuk interview 2020).

Victor Ekpuk worked as a cartoonist for the *Daily Times*, a leading Nigerian newspaper. His works have been shown at the *Institute du Monde Arabe* in Paris; the 12th Havana Biennial; the Dakar Biennial; the Tang Museum; Hood Museum; Fowler Museum; the Museum of Art and Design; Newark Museum of Art (USA); the World Bank; the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art; and the 1st Johannesburg Biennial.

His artworks are in permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art; the World Bank; Newark Museum; Hood Museum; Krannert Art Museum; the United States Art in Embassies Art Collection; and the Fidelity Investment Art Collection. Ekpuk has also been awarded commissions by major museums in the United States. In 2016, he designed trophies awarded to recipients of the museum's first African Art Awards by The Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African Art. The following year, he completed a large-scale 30 x 18ft. centrepiece mural commission at the North Carolina Museum of Art in the African art gallery. Furthermore, he is commissioned by Penguin Random House publishers to illustrate new covers of popular books by Africa's most renowned author, Chinua Achebe (Ekpuk, 2018, p.21).

Ekpuk's works usually examine the human condition, including identity, political, social, cultural and psychological issues. He pulls from a broader range of meanings rooted in African and worldwide contemporary art discussions. His paintings, drawings, and visual vocabulary are inspired by the beautiful indigenous African writing system Nsibidi, in which things are reduced to their simplest linear form.

Ekpuk created glyphs that reference both art and writing as a result of his abstraction of both form and meaning. His art investigates Nsibidi 'traditional' graphics and writing systems in Nigeria, which is guided by the Nsibidi aesthetic philosophy, in which sign systems are employed to transmit concepts (Ekpuk, 2018, p.28). His art is further inspired by his travels as a global artist, as exemplified in his statement: 'The subject matter of my work deals with the human condition as explained through universal and specific issues, such as family, gender, politics, culture and identity'. To communicate global topics, Ekpuk draws influence from Nsibidi symbols. Though Ekpuk only understands a portion of this ancient language known as Nsibidi, he creates his own graphic black and white writing to serve as a narrative backdrop to his art.

Ekpuk freely employs everything from sand to paint or black marker – as well as the occasional splash of colour – to portray current human experience. 'Today, my little knowledge of Nsibidi signs is based on observations and documented anthropological archives. My encounter with Nsibidi has motivated me to harness the essence of this ancient art form to communicate my modern experience' (Ekpuk, 2018, p.35). While he was growing up in Nigeria, he noticed Nsibidi symbols engraved on many objects and locations. At the time, he was unaware of the exact significance of each mark.

It was not until he started studying art at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria that he began to examine the more specific meanings and history of the unusual linear characters.

Ekpuk discovered that Nsibidi symbols had been painted, engraved, sculpted and performed for centuries in South-Eastern Nigeria. Ekpuk's artistic language is based on his own renditions of Nsibidi, which he has adapted to his own expression by changing the meanings and forms (Ekpuk, 2018, p.8). Ekpuk's linear writing-drawing is not a perfect copy of Nsibidi's visual language, nor are all of its components derived from the artist's African heritage. He has travelled to various regions of the world and discovered symbols everywhere he goes. He does not attribute a precise meaning to each mark. The shapes that unite in the African-American artist's drawings, paintings and sculptures function as abstractly as any patterning in Western-based modern art. Nonetheless, the foundations of his work in writing and symbolism imbue each mark, form, and colour region with meaning (Ekpuk interview 2020).

4.6 THE CONVERSATION WITH VICTOR EKPUK

To position the artworks within the field, further case-study questions were generated through a telephone interview with Victor Ekpuk and the reason for my questions is that art has become a vehicle for change, not a product to consume; and my focus is about preserving my cultural heritage through my practice: if it is not preserved, it will be lost forever. Therefore, an in-depth knowledge of Nsibidi symbols and of Victor's studio practice was essential; and the case-study questions as seen below were discussed (see Appendix 3 for complete interview).

Ekpuk explored his art in several media, including paper drawings and paintings on the wall as a temporary art for exhibition. Ekpuk's three-decade-long career has resulted in prestigious national and international exhibitions. He appreciates the idea of applying his effort to different forms of art, like sculpture, painting and commercial art, but draws upon sacred Nsibidi indigenous writing systems for inspiration.

Ekpuk's knowledge of his culture (Nsibidi) gave me an opportunity to understand and be more informed about Nsibidi cultural symbols.

I must admit having been fascinated and influenced by the in-depth knowledge gained from the interview. The first part of the interview questions was to know Ekpuk's knowledge and understanding of Nsibidi symbols.

Nsibidi was defined by Ekpuk as an ancient means of sacred communication among the male secret societies of the Ibibio, Efik, Ejagham, and Igbo peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria. He went on to say that it employs gesture, voice and the positioning of objects and graphic symbols to communicate concepts. Because they were secret communication codes, their meanings were only divulged to initiates. Some of these signs have been secularized and are utilized for public notices and record keeping.

As a result, Nsibidi's graphic component becomes one of Africa's indigenous writing systems. Ekpuk indicated that he is not a member of any of the societies that use Nsibidi and that he is simply learning as much as he can. On the other hand, being born into a culture where Nsibidi is a well-kept secret, as a child, he frequently witnessed Nsibidi being performed by members of the Ekpe and Ekpo secret clubs. He went on to say that some Nsibidi signs were painted as decorations on the bodies of maidens during rites of passage. In addition, he learned to avoid sacred and restricted locations marked with Nsibidi items.

Ekpuk may relate it to the yellow police tape that is used at crime scenes or restricted locations in Western nations. Ekpuk revealed that, while his current knowledge of Nsibidi signs is based on memory and documented anthropological archives, what he understands has greatly affected the direction of his work over the previous two decades as a professional visual artist. One of the study objectives (see question 1 in chapter 1) is to discover how contemporary artists have used Nsibidi in their practice; it was vital therefore to investigate why Ekpuk has drawn inspiration from the Nsibidi worldview. Ekpuk presented a careful examination of the aesthetics of Nsibidi and other African writing systems, revealing techniques of communication in which the substance of thoughts and concepts are expressed in abstracted symbols and signs.

Ekpuk added that he has constructed a distinctive lexicon that evokes the interaction of art and writing, with legibility and illegibility serving as analogies for his current sentiments. He believes that it is unnecessary to try to read his work literally and that it is more vital to allow oneself to enjoy the art without the weight of looking for meaning in each mark. Ekpuk's works clearly connected with the research by demonstrating Nsibidi cultural symbols, which motivated and guided the study.

The interview question on how Ekpuk – currently based in Washington, DC – has shaped his practice and what is the effect of cultural identity on his artistic development was designed to locate a common ground, as these correspond with the researcher creating artworks in the UK.

Ekpuk stated that being an immigrant from anywhere keeps adding to our identity each time we experience or live somewhere. Ekpuk said Yes, he did not grow up in the United States, becoming an American citizen; it does add to the notion of his identity. And living in America has affected his works, in different ways, but not in a negative way. He admits having experienced a different environment: a different cultural environment that would not have been possible if he were living in Nigeria. He described how his art encompasses many cultural heritages and eloquently conveys the human condition at a period when mismanagement of Nigeria's commonwealth led to a gradual deterioration of the citizenry's quality of life. Ekpuk's art provided a conduit through which he could respond to these situations (socio-political, African, and especially Nigeria's rich creative culture). This cultural context is where my own artistic forms emerge, and Ekpuk's works have influenced my aesthetic forms far more than any other, as my experience with Nsibidi offered my practice limitless possibilities and a foothold in the UK by creating ceramic forms with Western materials, for Nsibidi cultural preservation. It is apparent that Ekpuk's works aligned to the study through the demonstration of Nsibidi cultural symbols which have inspired it. In comparing Ekpuk's artworks to the study, the approach is quite different material-wise and in what the research artworks communicate, including the visual style presentation. However, the main similarities lie in the exploration of Nsibidi symbols in my ceramic practice for cultural preservation.



Figure 31 Title: *Good Morning, Sunrise*
 Material: Acrylic on canvas
 Source: *Connecting lines across space and time.*
 Artist: Victor Ekpuk
 Year: 2001



Figure 32 Title: *Big Fat Hen.*
 Source: *Connecting lines across space and time*
 Material: Acrylic on wood.
 Artist: Victor Ekpuk
 Year: 2015

4.7 SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES

The analysis revealed parallels and links among the case studies that informed this research. These case studies have helped me understand its importance, therefore informing and affecting my studio practice; and have even influenced the subsequent artworks that I will be developing for future exhibitions (form and Nsibidi expression). We are marked by various elements, events, things and memories throughout our lives and, as Odundo and Ekpuk note in the interviews, it is 'essential to allow art to be influenced by other artists'. The study has allowed itself to feel the art of the selected artists in order to achieve its research aims and to achieve the understanding of the creative process which positioned the study within the wider field of ceramics. Returning to culture for inspiration from a different cultural environment is a significant foothold of which artists such as Odundo and Ekpuk are categories of African contemporary artists that have demonstrated and benefited from it. As an African artist who derives ideas and creates forms from cultural symbols and fuses these into Western material for cultural preservation, this is a demonstration of cross-cultural practice which strengthens my cultural identity studying and living in the UK. The research, which builds on Odundo and Ekpuk's artworks to produce a story through forms and ideas borrowed from Nsibidi, contributes to my professional development in studio practice. Working with the artists chosen for the studies has also resulted in a number of valuable contacts that can be explored further in the future into prospective joint projects that connect us to art, since art can unify us and bring forth insights into both history and art history.

CHAPTER 5: STUDIO- BASED PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter relates to the research aims 2, 3 and 4 of the study: to create a body of ceramic artworks that demonstrates and articulates the possible creative ways of preserving Nsibidi cultural symbols through ceramics practices. In the initial testing phases, three potential processes were tried and tested, to establish a creative parameter of combining form and Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration in a state of recognition and appreciation. The first and second experiment were used as a basis for communicating the research ideas at the beginning of the study through the act of making; while the third gave the result, which achieved the objectives of the research. The studio-based practice is structured in terms of making of artworks, documentation and evaluation.

5.1 RATIONALE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CERAMIC ARTWORKS

It is no longer in doubt that many of our traditional cultures are becoming obsolete. This may be because of the emerging trends and technologies that have changed the narrative. Udeani stated that traditional symbols in diverse cultures are becoming obsolete. This is due to the fact that these signs and symbols are merely items documented in books, as opposed to signs and symbols of artistic expression (Udeani, 2014, p. 80). Kennedy maintained that artists, particularly contemporary artists, show their connectedness to their culture, which is often seen in their works (Kennedy, 1992, p. 15). This is true because contemporary Nigerian artists have engaged the use of traditional symbols in conceptualizing their creative works as seen in this study. It was important to make ceramic artworks to demonstrate the possibility of Nsibidi cultural symbols being preserved through ceramics practice.

The creative potential and practicality of the form and material testing phases were the key elements which ushered into being the production of the final ceramic artworks; and by building on the different progression test results, show the possibility of the research aims and objectives being achievable.

5.2 STRATEGY FOR THE STUDIO-BASED ARTWORK

As previously discussed in chapter two (see Figs. 33 and 34), these pieces were created as part of my first-year studio practical works at the beginning of my research project. These art pieces were concerned with the formulation of possible ceramic forms that would be a host for Nsibidi surface expression. Reflecting on the starting point of my research, it became evident at this time that I needed to revisit my research questions: how can new ceramic forms and symbols contribute to Nsibidi cultural preservation and what ceramics production methods can be used for the conceptualization of forms which serve as a vehicle for Nsibidi preservation? Visual qualities were unsuccessful in questioning the goal of my own studio practice based on the first sample test result, since the symbols could not be identified. These were directed by my intention of exploring form through a process of experimentation. The research study has allowed me to pursue my studio practice to an advanced level by formulating a practice-based research approach that is led by designing through making. It has been possible to actively experience and reflect upon the making process, which has resulted in a conscious reflective approach, which has created an independent thought that allows me to work and remain focused.



Figure 33: First sample test of form

Source: Elizabeth Esege

Year: 2018.



Figure 34: First sample test of form

Source: Elizabeth Esege

Year: 2018.



Figure 35: Second sample test of form and surface

Source: Elizabeth Esege

Year: 2021

The second sample was created at the commencement of my second year in 2019. The ceramic artworks demonstrated the potential of exploring Nsibidi symbolic meanings, rather than portraying the symbols; the collective forms were put together to convey the meaning rather than the symbol conveying the meaning (see Fig. 35). Therefore, the ceramic pieces did not meet the required demands, which necessitated another attempt at a sample test.

It was felt that the ceramic artworks should showcase the Nsibidi symbols at first glance, for easy identification for wider recognition and awareness. Most studio practices employ the use of sketches, which is very necessary for quick recording of inspiration and ideas and mostly for the definition of forms and texture with the use of lines (Nsenti, 2006). Designs to produce ceramic forms with Nsibidi symbols were developed through a series of sketches (see Fig 36.). Those with creative potential, which was determined based on similarities of the symbol shapes, were selected and transferred for the composition of a shape.

The studio practice records progressions, which consist of experimental drawing inspired by Nsibidi-similar lines composed into definite shapes, which resulted in a new ceramics form (see Fig. 38). The symbols were rigorously studied and selected. They were further sketched out to suit the ceramic form. In doing this, the research further fused the sketched lines from the symbols into a ceramic form, to radiate the aesthetics and functionality of the finished pieces.

The drawing process was very crucial in this research. Firstly, it was the quickest method of making thought visible on paper. Secondly, this gave room for reflection, planning and development of concepts into a cognitive vocabulary. Visual imagery in two dimensions was instrumental in the interpretation of the Nsibidi symbol and my personal narrative. However, the process was meaningful, as ink on paper for the sketches gave direction to the research. Ink and paper were the two main materials needed for this experimental exercise. The following sketches (see Figs. 36 and 37) were the first set of drawings on paper for the research.



Figure 36: Sketches of Nsibidi symbols with similar lines
Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2018

The next set of drawings required moving and reassembling Nsibidi-similar lines as elements for the creation of a new form, as seen in Figure 38. The curved lines from Nsibidi symbols for beauty, entrance, market and track were the symbols whose characteristics (similar lines) were used to assemble and develop the new ceramic form.

The result of the new form was an indication that an inspiration can be achieved from anything; and, through reflective practice and artistic ideas, the thought becomes an object of meaning (see Fig. 38).

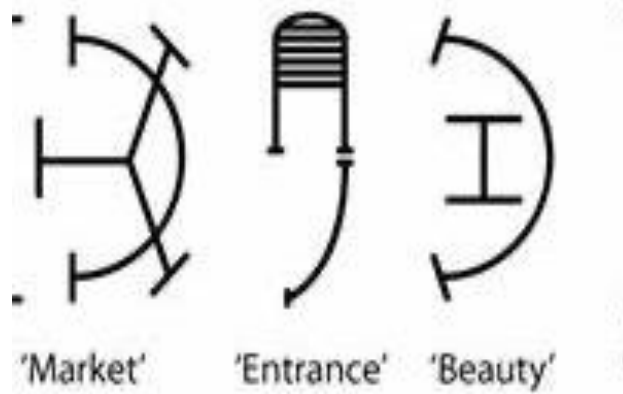


Figure 37: Series of experimental drawings of Nsibidi
Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019



Figure 38: Deconstructed lines perceived as active and mobile entities which were explored by stretching, bending, folding, twisting, arranging, rearranging and cutting to give birth to the new form.

Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019

The Nsibidi symbols are a unique means of communication among the Efiks/Ibibio and Ejagham people of Cross River State, Nigeria. As such, fusing Nsibidi-similar lines together to create a new ceramic form can be very interesting, since the aim of the research is to develop a new ceramic form that was not previously in existence. The research developed a practical approach combining similar lines from the Nsibidi symbols to create a new ceramic form, with which to aid the preservation of Nsibidi (see Fig. 38).

5.3 EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO CREATE A NARRATIVE

The composition of different Nsibidi symbols to narrate my life experience of studying and living in the UK (see Fig. 39) is important in my research practice, as art is a part of who we are. The idea of artistic freedom is a core value in art practice. William Staite Murray saw ceramics as art and rejected any necessity for functionality in his work, viewing his pots as pure art and giving them their own title. Murray's goal was to enhance the prestige and renown of pottery to a level where it would be considered equal to painting and sculpture (Rice, 2002, p.58). Several ceramicists followed Staite's track with a century's-worth of ideas about pottery as an art. In the 1970s, a generation of British ceramic makers leaned towards a more experimental approach to ceramic forms, in order to create a narrative. As part of a developing tradition of abstraction in contemporary ceramics, my research artifact is a self-defining process, meaning every made ceramic piece has a meaning. Art – like language – is a medium for communication, expression of ideas, sharing information and sharing thoughts (Houston, 1991, p.6). Nsibidi symbolism consists of moral values which the Efiks/Ibibio and Ejagham people hold as a sign of hospitality. Cardew believed that pottery should live and grow out of its own environment. His inclination towards adopting environmental influences in ceramics is eloquently manifested in the works of his famous trainee, Ladi Kwali, who took advantage of her newfound advanced technical knowledge to foster indigenous motifs from her immediate milieu in her works. In a similar perspective, the research has adopted Nsibidi cultural symbols to create a narrative of my life experience in my practice.

Art is an historical record that documents events and experiences: therefore, it is relevant that art practice tells our story; and continuous documentation of art practice and exhibition of artifacts (information and knowledge sharing) are preservation tools for cultural heritage sustainability.

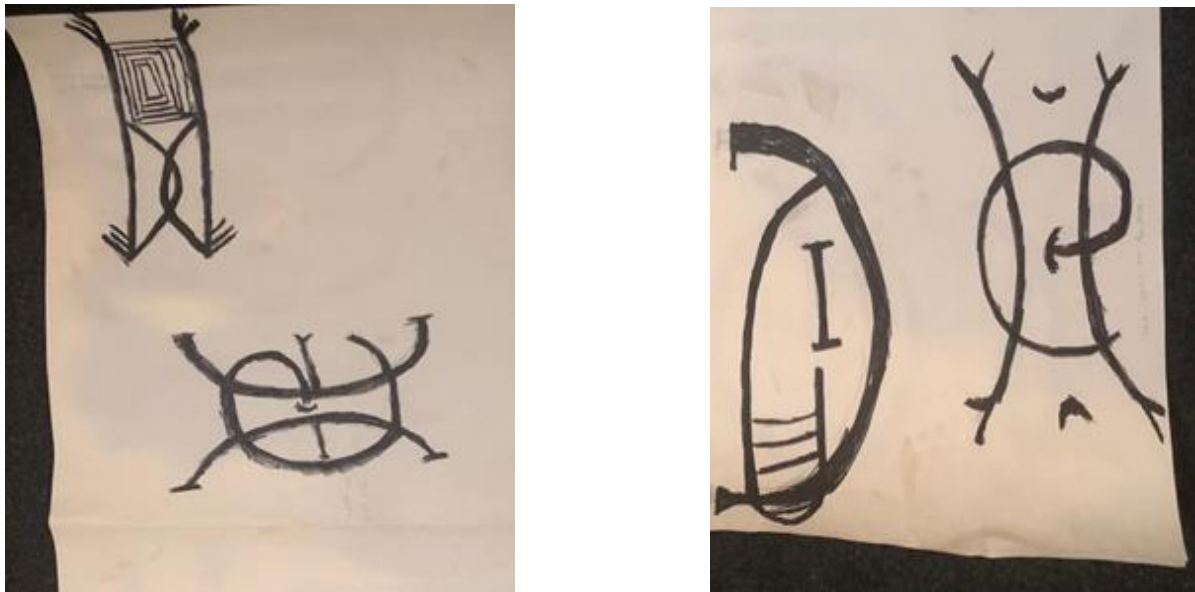


Figure 39: Sketches of Nisibidi symbols intentionally composed to narrate the researcher's life experience.

Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019

5.4 INTERPLAY OF DRAWING AND MAKING (CERAMIC FORMS)

A conscious reflective practice in the research study has allowed me to formulate a practice approach led by drawing/designing before making. Drawing is one of the oldest forms of human expression within the visual arts. The research employed drawing as the most efficient means of communicating and recording ideas before engaging with the art of making.

The studio practice recorded the progression of each stage of drawing, which resulted in an experimental drawing.

Drawing gave room for continuous reflection and development of concepts for the making of the ceramic pieces, as this allows the moving and assembling of Nsibidi-similar lines into creating an object of meaning for the research objectives to be achieved. The process of drawing was meaningful, as ink on paper gave direction for the making of the research artifacts. Using ink with paintbrush as a medium for the research drawings was done to create strong lines. Ink is important, because the intention is to have bold drawings which communicate the research idea.

5.5 MAKING OF NEW CERAMIC FORMS

In an intensive creative search by artists to innovate and create identity, Aniakor in Onuzulike (2005) has described this as a creative phenomenon, as it is a return to source, to the artistic essence of our tradition when transformed into a contemporary lexicon. It is upon the Nsibidi aesthetics that one can creatively conceptualize and consequently adapt the same into a creative production. The clay exploration of how the life of each piece began was with a sketch, as it was the first development which was an excellent way to start developing a design. It allowed the researcher to investigate a range of possibilities and rule out forms that are unsatisfactory before making them. The beauty of clay as a working material is that it can be manipulated into an immense variety of shapes, using a wide choice of techniques. The forms were achieved with hand building techniques. Hand building is the most ancient and versatile technique, which includes pinching out the shapes from soft clay, coiling ropes of clay and building forms from flat slabs of clay (Marsili, 2011). Thus creating the new ceramic forms started with a lump of clay (see Fig. 40) and a pinching method was used to establish the shape (see Fig. 41).

After the form was defined, the clay form was kept open in the studio to stiffen. It was then divided into two equal parts and the excess was scooped out to about ½"-thick walls.

The two sections were scored with a comb and clay slip was applied on all edges and joined, to create a firm seal, and the two equal parts were re-joined to achieve the piece.

The form surface was smoothed using tools and the greenware was allowed to dry to a leather-hard stage. The following Figures 40, 41, 42 and 43 capture the full exploration of the new ceramic form.



Figure 40: Lump of clay



Figure 41: Pinching method to establish the new form.



Figure 42: Two sections ready to be joined

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 43: The two sections scored with comb and waiting to be glued, with clay slip applied on all to create a firm seal.

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 44: New ceramic form achieved with Nsibidi-similar lines.

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 45: The making of the work titled
 “Togetherness”
 (Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)

5.6 DEVELOPING A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO PORTRAYING NSIBIDI SYMBOLS ON THE CERAMIC FORMS

From the theoretical approach, the research develops a practical approach to portraying the Nsibidi symbols on the new ceramic form. In doing this, the researcher engaged some creative techniques in conceptualizing the Nsibidi symbols on the form: while integrating the symbols into different types of ceramic forms, it was important to include Western material in the exploration since the studio practice was in the UK. The study adopted a deconstructivist approach in presenting the ceramic form with Nsibidi symbols. Literarily speaking, Deconstructivism is the act of taking apart a component of an object without necessarily damaging it, while prioritizing and taking advantage of certain parts (Lane, 1988, p.1)

Deconstructivism is a postmodern architecture approach to art which often manipulates the structure's surface and deploys non-rectilinear shapes which appear distorted and dislocated. Its name comes from the idea of 'Deconstruction', a form of semiotic analysis developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (Tianyu, 2001). Deconstructivism in contemporary architectural art style has been used by many artists, such as Jim Lawton, with his work titled *Suspension*; and Aurore Chabot with their work titled *Changeling* (Richard, 1999, pp.151,221); Therefore, this study adopted a deconstructivist approach for the presentation of Nsibidi symbols on the new ceramic form which serve as a host for Nsibidi preservation (See Fig 46 and 47).



Figure 46: Deconstructive approach of portraying
Nsibidi symbols
(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 47: New ceramic forms portraying Nsibidi symbol for
Entrance and Beauty
(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)

After the new form has been created, the act of reflective practice (see chapter 1, p.16) was engaged in, as these also enable the artist to express fresh ideas on how to portray Nsibidi symbols on the new ceramics form, without altering the ceramic pieces. Repeating the same process to utilise more ceramic pieces, Nsibidi symbols were cut out on each new form. The cutting was achieved with the help of a small table knife, after which the piece was smoothed and allowed to dry in the studio (see Figs. 46 and 47).

The following aesthetic ceramic forms explored in Figures 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 59 and 60 were fired at 1000 degrees C: they are to serve as ceramic objects for decoration. The intention of inventing ceramic objects is mostly for storage purposes since ancient times. Aesthetic judgment and appreciation of works created by potters are closely connected with the past traditions and the necessity of preserving the uniqueness of each culture. In comparison with other pottery, both Japanese and Chinese ceramic design reflect the nobility and aesthetic-rich tradition (Sosnovsky, 1999, p.22).

In the 20th century, the dominant ceramic aesthetics was primarily connected with the idea of visual harmony, based on using simple materials and hand-making tools. Later the art of ceramics was primarily aimed at striking the balance between aesthetics and practical use of the ceramic object (Hopper, 2000, p.48).

In this regard, the research artifact is considered to function as an historical piece, as they depict Nsibidi symbols for cultural preservation.



Figure 48: New ceramic forms portraying Nsibidi symbol
for Reflection
(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 49: The work titled
"Togetherness" in its greenware
stage



Figure 50: "Togetherness" in a
bisque stage inside the kiln

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 51: work titled
"Togetherness" side view



Figure 52: work titled "Togetherness"
second side view

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)

The study employed the same method, used in establishing the new form, for a set of wall ceramic pieces in a narrative manner. From the point where the clay form was defined, it was then divided into two sections and slabs were used in building a wall for each section. The slab and part of each divided piece were scored, and clay slip applied on all edges and firmly joined, therefore turning the new ceramic form into two separate wall pieces. The form surface was smoothed with tools and a relief of Nsibidi symbols was illustrated on the surface of the form (see Figs. 59 and 60). The different stages of exploration indicate diverse expression which resulted from reflective practice; and the personality of each ceramic form is a narrative of the Nsibidi symbolic meaning which is assumed to be a moral standard for humans found in the region from where the symbol is said to have originated (Efiks/Ibibio, Ejagham Cross River State, Nigeria).



Figure 53: Roll out slab score with comb



Figure 54: Slab for creating wall piece

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 55: Gluing the clay slab to the wall piece with slip application.



Figure 56: Newly-finished wall pieces

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 57: Newly-finished wall pieces



Figure 58: Mounting of the wall pieces

(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 59: *"Separation"*
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment
Year: 2020



Figure 60: *"Family ties"*
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment
Year: 2020



Figure 61: "*Home*"
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment
Year: 2020



Figure 62: "*Focus*"
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment
Year: 2020

5.7 TECHNIQUES EXPLORED IN THE STUDIO PRACTICES

In achieving the desired ceramic forms with Nsibidi symbols, the researcher engaged several techniques, one being the burnishing technique. Burnishing is a method in which clay is polished to a beautiful sheen without the use of glaze. This was used to give the ceramic form an African appearance, as the earthenware is given its sheen appearance by rubbing the ware with a smooth stone.

This strategy is in accordance with Magdalene Odundo. She uses this technique to finish most of her ceramic sculptures. Clarke went on to say that she, like ancient potters, hand-builds her vessel, moulding the clay forms without the use of a potter's wheel. She burnishes the vessel after the clay has dried, then covers it with slip and burnishes it again (2016, p.24). Early potters utilized burnishing to make their pottery more watertight and sanitary. Most potters nowadays use glaze for this purpose. However, many people choose to complete their work by burnishing, because of the subtle, earthy beauty that a burnished clay surface possesses. A burnished ceramic ware has its own delicate, tactile touch (see Figs. 46 and 47).

Glazes were used on most of the research artifacts. Glazing means to add colours to your pottery (see Figs. 66 and 68) and glaze is a glass coating fused on to a ceramic body through firing, thus rendering earthenware vessels suitable for holding liquids by sealing the inherent porosity of unglazed biscuit ware (Steve, 2003, p.178). The research used transparent clear glaze to modify the appearance of the biscuit wares. The glazing technique employed was the pouring method and the glossy glaze was fired at 1200 degrees C. It was important to utilize the quality of ceramic materials and equipment available for my research works, so as to achieve a far-reaching effect on the final ceramic pieces. Using durable environmental Western materials and techniques to elevate my practice and Nsibidi cultural symbol is the opportunity that studying in the UK has afforded me. Decal transfer techniques were applied to the glazed ceramic forms (see Fig 68).

Ceramic decal is a transfer technique that is used to apply pre-printed images or designs on ceramic pieces. At the beginning of my study year, it was relevant to equip myself with all the necessary training needed for the research, and decal techniques were identified for ceramic surface finishing.

Decal offered me the opportunity of reproducing similar designs made of Nsibidi symbols repeatedly on the research artifacts. These techniques were to improve the appearance of the ceramic piece and thus to widen the ranges of ceramic surfaces used in my research.

5.8 MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

The major materials employed in this research were clay (earthenware clay, paper clay, porcelain and stoneware clay), decal and transparent glaze. Closing the study without writing something about clay, which was an essential material in the whole process, would make the research incomplete, as it was the major material used for the studio practice. Mattinson states that: "Pottery is undoubtedly one of the most exacting of crafts and one in which the science is essential to the art." He added that potters must learn to handle their materials and control the chemistry involved, before they are able to work with it (2003, p.14).

Clay is to the potter what musical notes are to a music maker, or what alphabets are to a writer. They are a potter's means of giving form to thoughts, as well as conveying ideas and information to viewers. In recording of history, apart from the archaeologist, clay is a vital means of documenting relevant history, which can be confirmed from the work of the prehistoric period. Pottery is one of the oldest human inventions. In contemporary ceramics, clay is a unique vehicle for personal expression and this material allows artists to create both functional and decorative works (Mattinson, 2003, p.6). Clay is malleable; and its ability to retain shapes means it can hold information by way of retaining the fingerprints of the potter. Therefore clay can be used as the means of recording Nsibidi cultural symbols for their preservation (Mattinson, 2003, p.7). Various clay types were available for the research, including earthenware clay, paper clay, porcelain and stoneware clay. Before the commencement of my studies in the UK, earthenware red clay was the only clay my studio practice had engaged with. Exploration with both porcelain and paper clay impacted on my practical investigation. At first encounter, the non-plastic nature of both clay bodies discouraged me from utilising it at the experimental stage of the research.

As I progressed with my studio practice, my core practice became the act of mastering my materials (clay) and understanding the physical characteristics and firing properties of the material in order to achieve success. Porcelain and paper clay retain their attractive qualities, no matter how manipulated they become: their beauty is seen before and after firing. This fascination inspired an artifact titled “Beauty of Mind Set” (see Fig. 64). The forms which portray the Nsibidi symbols for beauty and journey are explored to show the true nature and beauty of this Western material (clay). All the different clays used in the study were ready-to-use clay bodies available to me in the studio, purchased by the Department.

The tools and equipment used in the creating and finishing processes were manually operated. These included the potter’s banded wheel; clay modelling tools, including palette, metal and wooden kidneys; as well as other self-made tools adopted during the creative making process. The practice made use of tools such as a table surface to facilitate easy wedging and kneading of clay. Scrapers were used for reclaiming excess clay from tables; wooden spatulas for beating and aligning form to shape; metal and rubber kidneys for smoothing clay surfaces; and sharp pointed knives for slitting wet clay form and cutting greenware. Other tools included nylon sheets, sponges, turning tools and – most important of all – the researcher’s. The nature of tools and equipment available for the research has a massive impact on the final forms; and studying in the UK has afforded me access to international standardized equipment.

The hand tools were very personal as they help to facilitate the hand-building method, which includes pinching, the coiling technique and slab method for the realization of the artifact. Electric kilns were used for firing all the created artifacts and this was my first experience of the process. This is because it was not available for my use in Nigeria. The kiln is the final judge and is an indispensable piece of equipment within ceramics production. It is in the kiln that clay is converted into ceramics through the heating process. The research was carried out using electric kilns within the Department of Glass and Ceramics.

DRYING

Research artifacts were all dried in a controlled environment, and therefore precisely, in the studio. Each piece was wrapped in airtight cellophane sheet and left for a minimum of three days. This allowed for even moisture distribution within the clay wall, thus preventing uneven drying of the form. Thereafter, the sheets covering each form were removed and the piece was left to dry out at room temperature.

5.9 DESIGN ELEMENTS FOR NSIBIDI EXPRESSION ON THE CERAMIC FORMS

Studio practice engaged balance, proportion, unity and variety in achieving the new ceramic forms and the surface expression of Nsibidi on them. The study used a variety of the Nsibidi symbols and techniques to create a balance in the design. The interplay of the lines and forms gives the ceramic forms equilibrium. The fusion of the Nsibidi symbols as the surface design was proportionally placed to achieve the desired forms. The symbols were successfully crafted into the surface of the ceramic forms for aesthetics purposes. The symmetric balance was ensured to equal the stability of the ceramic pieces. This is important for every piece of art to have a balance, as this is one of the basic principles of design.

5.10 WESTERN MATERIALS USED: STONEWARE CLAY, PORCELAIN PAPER CLAY, TRANSPARENT GLAZE AND DECAL

Stoneware is a vitreous or semi-vitreous ceramic material typically composed of stoneware clay or non-refractory fire clay. It is a dense pottery fired at a high temperature. The study has employed stoneware clay with transparent glaze to achieve research aim 4 (see Fig. 63). The ceramic form was achieved through the pinching, coiling and slab method of ceramic production and Nsibidi symbols were incised on the form surface. This is in line with research aim 4: to develop clay work that demonstrates Western concept/ideas, material and techniques for the enhancement of Nsibidi cultural heritage.



Figure 63: "*The Research Journey*"
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment.
Year: 2020

The object below (Fig. 64) was produced with porcelain clay, porcelain paper clay and earthenware paper clay. The ceramic technique used to achieve it is the pinching, coiling and slab method of ceramic production. It is a composition of three Nsibidi symbols (love, reflection and journey). The symbols were composed to narrate the researcher's mindset developed at adulthood. The surface expression created with the Nsibidi symbols for beauty, reflection and journey is designed to show the true nature and beauty of Western material (clay). The fusion of these symbols into the

clay explains the context that the mind must always be filled with positive things to allow the entrance of beauty to everything.



Figure 64: *"Beauty of Mindset"*
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment
Year: 2020



Figure 65: *"Mother's Anger"*
Source: Elizabeth Esege studio experiment
Year: 2020

The studio experiment used decals to portray the Nsibidi symbol for hatred. The symbol is creatively repeated for emphasis. They are also used as rhythm, which suggests movement. The ceramic form was achieved through the pinching, coiling and slab method. The finishing technique employed is transparent glaze and decal (see Fig. 65).



Figure 66: New ceramic form portraying the Nsibidi symbol for Journey
(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)



Figure 67: New ceramic form portraying the Nsibidi symbols for Beauty and Love
(Source: Elizabeth Esege, 2019)

5.11 DISCUSSION

The studio exploration pieces combined coiling, slab and pinching techniques for the creation of the research artifact. The study employed the pinching method at the lower section of every form and coiling and slab methods were used in building the rest of the form. Deconstruction and reconstruction were products of reflective practice. These are activities that lie within the borders of self-inquiry and series of introspective thoughts before the form was engaged with a tool.

In the attempt to do justice to the research topic, a minimum of twenty-five artifacts were created. They cut across two major themes, which border on Nsibidi and the researcher's life experience both in Nigeria and the UK. All the artifacts are original and conceptual. The studio played a significant role in the successful exploration of each concept presented in this research.

They all started and finished with the hand-building method. Hand-building is one of the oldest and first methods employed to make vessels. In the free and open structure within which ceramicists operate, this is why the research looked to the longstanding traditional ceramics production method, as this is the major practice technique in Nigeria/Africa.

Every research artifact portrays Nsibidi cultural symbolism. A few of the artifacts stand alone, while others are composed to form a narrative which represents the researcher's experiences. Incorporating Nsibidi symbols from Nigeria into a Western environmental material (paper clay, porcelain, stoneware clay, decal and transparent glaze) to explore ceramic objects in the UK is a positive experience which strengthens my cultural identity, as this offers me the opportunity to express my cultural heritage for the Western audience (see Figs. 51, 65 and 67).

The use of different clays exhibited in this research is an attempt to experience the Western materials which studying in the UK has made possible. Each clay revealed its physical characteristics when manipulated to create a form. My artist's sense of timing, by way of knowing the right time to carry out certain activities, such as joining, cutting, bending, pressing, twisting, made every clay expression exciting. The kiln was the final arbiter. Heat also had a say in the surface textures. Viewers can interpret this as various sorts of visual and tactile textures.

Attempts were made at obtaining smooth surfaces on some of the research artifacts through use of the burnishing technique, to obtain an African appearance to reflect my cultural origin and the enduring traditional style for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural heritage (see Figs. 47 and 48).

The burnishing skills employed in the ceramic pieces was brought to perfection through an in-depth study of Magdalene Odundo's earthenware pieces (see chapter 4, p. 60).

For the sake of academic meaning, the research will discuss the pieces with each narrative story associated with the ceramic forms. The figures are as follows: 51, 52, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64 and 65.

Figures 51 and 52: *Togetherness* (Narrative story)

Togetherness is a visual representation of the bond of unity among the culturally diverse people of Cross River State, where the Nsibidi symbols originated from. Cross River itself is culturally diverse and rich; diverse in cuisines, diverse in cultural practices, with over 36 languages, such that a certain tribe has different languages for the male and female folks by default: male children grow up to learn the male language, while the female learns theirs within the same household. It is a taboo for a male child to pronounce or name items in the female version and vice versa. The beauty of it all is that both sexes could understand each other, but speak differently, even in a personal conversation between a man and a woman. It is said that the tribe known as New Jerusalem is perhaps the site of the biblical tower of Babel. However, in all these, the people coexist in harmony and are known for hospitality which contributes to its touristic potential. It affirms the words of the great historian O. E. Uya, who maintains that the 'unifying influence [of Nsibidi] within the Cross-River region is no longer debatable' (Slogar, 2007). The Nsibidi symbols used on the piece are an illustration of togetherness, such that although the symbols are different in shapes with different meaning, they are from same source (Nsibidi). This is to tell visitors that the people of Cross River State, Nigeria are known for hospitality and welcome Unity and Peace, as seen in the ceramic art piece.

Figure 59: *Separation* (Narrative)

Separation is an extension of family ties, as well as a personal statement and reflection on the painful scourge associated with the loss of a dear one who was once part and parcel of the family. It particularly captures siblings that loved each other in unity, but became separated by the death of one of them. The Nsibidi symbol for love and unity further illustrates the bond of affection that seems to tie minds, souls and bodies across the sublime terrain of the world beyond. Such deep-seated emotions tend to keep memories alive, though hurting, but could be impossible to let go. The composition of the ceramic pieces depicts their origin: where they all started and the family bond they once shared. The Nsibidi symbol for hatred illustrated on one of the pieces is the vacuum created by the death of a family member.

Figure 60: *Family ties* (Narrative)

Family ties is a visual metaphor for the irreplaceable role of the family to sustain the sanctity of values, good morals and folktales in Africa. It is a common practice in most African societies to find families ensconced in peaceful harmony to share moonlight tales. The family unit is considered the first point of call on the journey to discipline, morality, fair judgment and justice. The coming together of the family, to deliberate, institute, suggest, constitutionalize and elucidate issues that have to do with the family is non-negotiable, because it keeps them united. This unity has a direct 'boomeranging' effect on society at large. The Nsibidi symbol for male, female and child composed in the ceramic pieces is used to communicate the idea of family unity in society.

Figure 61: *Home* (Narrative)

Home is seen as a place of rest and comfort; it offers security: as the saying implies, 'East or West home is the best'; and this saying about home is confirmed, because, for me, my home is the best place in the world, because of the absolute peace and harmony I enjoy and experience at home, from my husband down to my son. To others it might be a high level of comfort they derive from a well-furnished home; for others, it may be the serenity of the environment they live in that makes them feel at home.

In a nutshell, home is that place where you find peace and joy. The Nsibidi symbol for house and beauty composed on the wall ceramic pieces is used to communicate an idea of a beautiful home.

Figure 62: *Focus* (Narrative)

Focus is a gentle reminder of the indispensability of an unwavering target in the pursuit of success. The work resonates with Paulo Coelho's ideology that 'whenever you want to achieve something, keep your eyes open, reflect, concentrate and make sure you know exactly what it is you want. No one hit their target with their eyes closed' (Cane, 2015, n.p). One who reflects on every human action remains on track, not letting go of the target, which is your set-out goals, in spite of what life throws; for, in the end, you will eventually reach the desired destination. The Nsibidi symbol for reflection shows what always leads to hatred and divorce.

When a negative treatment and experiences have been consciously reflected upon, feelings of hatred set in and, if not managed properly, it ends in divorce. The three ceramic artforms titled *Focus* are a watch-word for the researcher to communicate the idea learned from her parent's failed marriage.

Figure 63: *Research Journey* (Narrative)

The researcher's life in a foreign land comments on the nuanced obstacles of the human existence occasioned by limitless challenges in a new environment. Life is fraught with challenges, problems and hassles. The challenges of life are enormous and multifaceted. The ceramic form portraying the Nsibidi symbolism for journey, reflection and love is composed in a narrative. The symbol for journey represents the PhD journey; the reflection symbol depicts every reflective moment that led to decision-making; and the Nsibidi symbol for love illustrates how the researcher loved every process. The space on the piece shows dents and scars, while the dark portions are representing harsh memories and pains that come with life's struggles in a new environment. The wave part of the form shows the storms encountered when the researcher determined to embark on a journey (studying in the UK) that leads to greatness. Through it all, there is a surge upwards which encourages hope during chaos.

The surface is intentionally finished with a shining glaze effect as a sign of sunshine, to further buttress the struggle of life and possible rays of hope respectively, at the end of a very dark tunnel of life.

The piece is a personal reflection on past experiences: the failures, pains, hardship and betrayal the researcher encountered when she decided to study in the UK, and the failed studio experiments at the early stage of her study. The processes in the search for relevance and fulfilment in life was all loved. After reflecting on the PhD journey at this point in life, the researcher gleaned that, no matter how bad it started or how hard it gets, it is certain that after the storm comes the shine.

Figure 64: *Beauty of Mindset* (Narrative)

It is a common cliché that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. While this could be true at face value, there could also be beauty in ugliness. The pieces are a combination of the Nsibidi symbols for beauty, journey and divorce; and they narrate the mindset the researcher developed at adulthood, especially coming from a divorced family background.

She used her parent's divorce experience to create a happy union with her husband, which expresses that there is beauty in ugliness, beauty can unite with ugliness to become "Ugly Beauty" – a unique combination indeed. It is this uniqueness that is portrayed in the ceramic art works composed with China clay (porcelain) which, in its pure state, gets entrapped in distorted forms. The connotation here is the complementarity of opposing extremes. Porcelain clay and porcelain paper clay retain their attractive qualities, no matter how manipulated they become, their beauty is seen in white. The form, which portrays the Nsibidi symbols for beauty and journey, is explored to show the true nature and beauty of Western material (clay).

Figure 65: *Mother's Anger* (Narrative)

The anger of a mother is a visual metaphor of motherhood. Mother's love for her child is always unfeigned in all the earth, except for a few miscreants who perpetrate animalistic tendencies. As real as mother-child love is, these two continually suffer unforeseen traumas tossed into one's path by the other.

The narratives surrounding the trauma of childbirth and the task of child-rearing are all encapsulated in the work. The piece is a specific narrative of a mother-present state of mind: who carried a child after nine months of pregnancy and raised her as a single mother for 34 years, then died unexpectedly in a car crash. The Nsibidi symbol for hatred shows her feelings and resentment towards her ordeal. The repeated Nsibidi symbolism for hatred on the piece is an illustration of her present perception and feelings towards an unfair life as the study described.

The information gathered from Nsibidi eventually became idealized emotions (data) needed for expression. For the expression to take place, the practice created a body of ceramics pieces as a language of expression (both narrative and symbols combined), for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural heritage. These works are hand-building and fired at 1000 degrees C. The earthy colour which some of the ceramic's artworks possess are a deliberate intention to portray African Appearance, which is the root of the researcher's origin.

5.12 EVALUATION OF PRACTICAL WORKS BY RESEARCHERS FROM NIGERIA

The research artifacts were evaluated by researchers from Nigeria, who have knowledge about Nsibidi cultural symbols. These scholars are significant people in the field of art and design. They were chosen with a range of diverse perspectives as they relate to the research objectives. The approach to the evaluation began with taking professional photographs of the research artifacts and sending them via email to each of the reviewers in Nigeria. The feedback from the evaluation was received via email. These researchers include Umana Nnochiri, John Agberia, Babson Ajibade and Chris Echeta. The researchers' profiles and detailed evaluations of the artifacts are included as appendices (see appendices 4-7).

Umana Nnochiri, who is a lecturer in textiles and a consultant on carnival costumes and cultural matters in Cross River State, Nigeria has been credited with the development of and support for the stylistic ceramic forms for further preservation of Nsibidi cultural symbols, which are almost going extinct, with minimal presence in very few places.

Chris Echeta, a professor of ceramics, in an appreciation of the research artifacts confirms the research as being a successful attempt in 'casting Nsibidi in stone'. He added that 'casting in stone' as a figure of speech implies preservation, permanence, and indelibility.

John Agberia is a professor of Fine Arts & Design, in the Department of Fine Arts and Design of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Agberia confirmed that the research study on Nsibibi added voice to the ongoing narrative, as it provides a wide and liberal perspective to its symbolism and the ceramic forms provide a fetish ground purposefully representative of ancient and modern narrative.

Agberia further added that the Nsibidi cursive symbols, which Esege is appropriating as her research forms, are an array of a body of dynamic intellectual knowledge for developing new ceramic forms in an academic and cultural setting; and for the research, it is a new creative oeuvre that can significantly contribute to knowledge, particularly viewed from the angle of an African narrative in modernist scholarship and further preserved Nsibidi cultural heritage.

Babson Ajibade is a professor of African visual culture and visual anthropology in the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology, Cross River State, Nigeria. Babson is delighted to know that the research artifact will be adding an academic and studio "voice" to the rekindling and preservation of the Nsibidi symbols; Babson being one who has researched on an aspect of the Nsibidi previously, looked at the specimens of research artifacts, and established that they indicate a certain subtle plasticity that transcends the cultural confines of the African visuality, and imbued with an otherness of new materialities, which give the created forms fresh energy. Further, by using new global materialities to inform the creation of ceramics inspired from Africa local culture, the researcher has successfully recreated works that are 'trans-local': 'trans-local', because they are neither truly local, nor are they ostensibly global. They straddle the two realms and the in-betweens of trans-national sociocultural spaces.

As an African ceramicist who has demonstrated their cultural heritage and identity (Nsibidi cultural symbols) through their ceramics practice while studying in the UK, the analysis from the evaluation has established the research artifacts as representative of both ancient tradition and modern narrative. This is a confirmation that the historical culture informed the contemporary practice, both viewed within a global context.

These observations and comments from researchers validate the foundation of the research aims and these will influence my post-PhD intentions regarding subsequent artworks that will be developed for future exhibitions.



Figure 68: Practical works exhibited at National Glass Centre, Sunderland for awareness

Source: Elizabeth Esege

Year: 2021



Figure 69: Practical works exhibited at National Glass Centre, Sunderland for awareness
Source: Elizabeth Esege
Year: 2021.

5.13 SUMMARY

Writing is the visible representation of words; it is anything – pictured, drawn or arranged –that may be turned into a spoken account. The primary goal of writing is to communicate ideas. Our forefathers, on the other hand, were designers long before they were writers; and pictures, drawings and design played an important role in communication from the beginning. In the absence of the written word, Africa's legacy consists of a vast *mélange* of complex symbols, patterns and signs. 'These aesthetically abstract configurations and unique characters replaced linguistic symbols commonly used for recording the history of remarkable events, the deeds of great kings, celebrations, births and deaths, and extraordinary occurrences' (Nwafor, 2019).

A symbol is a language, a kind of symbol invented to serve a purpose, purely for emotional expressiveness. However, symbols can be conceived as a way of expressing a language, sometimes understood by a certain society and others, if educated about the symbols.

In consolidating the practice, the study focused on the key aspects of the methodological inquiry/studio practice, whose aim is to develop a new ceramic form to portray Nsibidi symbols for cultural preservation. This chapter has explained the creative processes the research employed to adequately achieve the goal of the study. Reflective practice and purposeful observation were the principal approaches used in the preliminary and final interpretation in the formulation of all forms and materials.

Reflective practice talks about the practitioner being part of their research. Schon (2012) defines reflective practice as the practice by which professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience. The study affirms this definition and adds that reflective practice was highly imperative in this study, as it generated meaningful cognitive information on the subject matter of this research. The perspective stems from Gray and Malins' (1995, p.3) assertion that critical analysis and debate, as well as the formation of theoretical and philosophical frameworks, are the responsibility of the practitioner – the craftsperson, rather than the 'external' critic, historian or theoretician. The informed, intimate perspective of the study's reflective approach resulted in a deeper level of insight achievable via experiment: 'tacit' knowledge.

The truth of the matter is that, in reflective practice, the researcher's state of mind is a residual knowledge of their environment, and reaction to material as well as minute judgments of steps taken in generating insight, and new perspectives towards what is being explored (ceramic artifact).

Chapter 6 discusses the conclusion, contribution to knowledge and areas for further research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes the research findings and connects them to the research questions and objectives established at the commencement of this study. The research had an impact on my artistic practice and has contributed to knowledge. Possible areas for further research have been highlighted, and the research rounds off with a concluding remark.

Nsibidi has been researched by scholars and used by contemporary studio artists, but there is a lack of contemporary representation of Nsibidi symbols in ceramics practice. This research is a unity of form and surface. It was born out of a need to conceptualize ceramics form and surface as a unified form for Nsibidi cultural preservation.

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks were grounded in Kubler's theory of form and Mathieu's concept of surface, respectively.

The research provided an in-depth understanding of form and Nsibidi symbolism and, in the history of ceramics surfaces, ancient Greek art surface decoration was parallel to the research (as mentioned in section 2.2).

The unified research artifacts' outcomes did not embody meaning only; the ceramic objects became narrative pieces for recording life experiences relating to the researcher's study environments (Nigeria and the UK).

6.1 CONCLUSION RELATING TO RESEARCH QUESTION 1 AND AIM 1

Question 1 How have artists engaged the use of forms, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols in their Art/Craft practice?

Aim 1 To review the history and development of ceramic forms, surface expression and Nsibidi symbols used in contemporary art practice.

The research started with a critical inquiry into the origins and development of ceramic form and surface expression in the history of ceramics to position the study within the field.

The literature review discovered that various evolutions of ceramic forms were primarily informed by problems associated with human needs for containment; that initially form was conceived around united shapes and these shapes had symbolic references traceable to their originating communities. The introduction of the potter's wheel changed the way forms were designed and perceived. In an advanced society, contemporary potters tend towards personalized sculptural expressive form, most of them pursuing social and political themes.

The development of ceramics revolves around two- or three-dimensional forms and draws relevance from surface quality. The concern of studio potters over the years has always revolved around these two parameters, which largely dictate individual style and professional practice. These two concepts continue to evolve in response to the elastic capability and philosophies of the individual ceramicist. Generation has always been guided by either tradition, utility sensibility or aesthetic concerns. A detailed artist's case studies conducted in Chapter 4 examined Magdalene Odundo's ideological concepts of form exploration and burnishing surface, which have inspired and informed the study in the direction of forms and surface expression. The contextual review on Nsibidi cultural symbols shows a clear research gap on the exploration of Nsibidi cultural symbols in ceramics practices from the beginning of Nigerian art, until recently with a textile designer such as Nnochiri, whose works seem to share relative similarities with this research. The differences revolved around materials and style, as well as subject area: Nnochiri explored Nsibidi symbols as motif for textile batik production. The case study on Victor Ekpuk, who has engaged the use of Nsibidi in his contemporary practices (see Chapter 4), gave an in-depth knowledge about Nsibidi symbols; and this has further benefited and positioned the research artifacts within the field. The findings from the literature review and case study gave an understanding of Nsibidi symbolism. Therefore, closing the existing gap in the conceptualization of ceramic form and Nsibidi surface expression, which this study is designed to fill, has been achieved.

6.2 CONCLUSION RELATING TO RESEARCH QUESTION 2 AND AIM 2

Question 2 How can new ceramic forms and symbols contribute to Nsibidi cultural preservation?

Aim 2 To conceptualize ceramic forms and Nsibidi symbols as surface expression for Nsibidi cultural preservation.

The research project has enabled me to take my studio practice to the next level, by developing a practice-based research method that is guided by design through making and form exploration through experimentation. The first body of artwork was concerned with the exploration of a new ceramic form (see Chapter 5, Figs. 33 and 34). The second body of artworks was concerned with depicting Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration (see Chapter 5, Fig. 35). The first and second processes of exploration did not work in line with the research aims and objectives.

The creative potential and practicality of the form and material testing phases were the key elements which ushered in the production of the new ceramic form. By building on the different progression test results, the final research artifact was developed (see Chapter 5), which answered the research question and achieved the research aim. This research offered me the opportunity to employ a wide range of ceramic production methods, including pinching, coiling and slabbing techniques. The combination of various production methods through the mastering of techniques is what facilitated the replication and creation of all the artifacts. The research findings have been disseminated in a variety of ways, as well as its conclusions. A formal presentation of the final finished ceramic artworks has been given to several researchers and academics to evaluate and review. The researchers are significant artists from Nigeria, the place where the cultural symbol originated.

The feedback from the evaluation establishes the research artifacts as being successful: that is, expressively casting Nsibidi symbols on a durable material which is lacking in contemporary ceramic works in Nigeria. Therefore, this is adding to the cultural preservation of Nsibidi symbols.

An abstract waiting approval has equally been submitted for publication. In addition, regular supervisory tutorials and involvement in group critiques with other PhD students have provided me the opportunity to discuss and present my research; all these are important ways of presenting the research to a wider audience. The new artifact has been exhibited in the National Glass Centre in Sunderland before the Viva: the exhibition and rationale behind this body of works is a demonstration that the artworks are of exhibition quality within the contemporary field. In developing and presenting the artworks in this exhibition manner, it will be possible to professionally evaluate the outcomes of the research artifacts. The benefits of the studio results and knowledge gained from the study have been shared with artists, who have met Nsibidi symbols and have participated in a project related to cultural symbols. The feedback given on the study from different perspectives: from case study artists, the supervisory team and the opinions of peers; all of this has helped to position this research study within the field. The research artworks act as a model for cultural preservation, as surface decoration on the pottery of ancient Greece is parallel to the study. Its surface pattern has inspired the research and has opened a window for the artifacts to create narrative stories with Nsibidi symbols. These also inspired the conceptualization of the new ceramic forms and exploration of Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration, and this has positioned my ceramic practice for cultural preservation. The research artifacts will be kept at the British Museum with their artist statement, which discusses the intention and meaning of the artworks. This is to support other found objects with Nsibidi inscriptions donated to the museum in the year 1950 without proper documentation. Most of the artifacts and collections displayed in museums and galleries all over the world are from remarkable cultures. This is because they want to consciously preserve them for knowledge and reference purposes; and having my ceramic objects displayed at British Museum is a great potential for preserving Nsibidi cultural symbols in an international environment.

Finally, this thesis will be published, and a digital copy of the thesis will be made available in the library, on the research website and to the artists who participated in the case studies; and it is hoped that this will lead to further interest in the research, new collaborations and more exhibitions in the future. All these will be an important way of disseminating the research and for Nsibidi cultural symbols to be preserved.

The development of a new ceramic form and exploring Nsibidi symbols as surface expression in my practice demonstrates a research model for others, who may want to preserve their culture through art practice. The body of artifacts that have been presented in this research will be displayed in various exhibitions, at the Nike cultural art galleries in Lagos in Nigeria, and in the British museum; and these will create further awareness of Nsibidi symbols. Materials reviewed on selected contemporary clay artists in the introductory Chapter and the contextual review revealed a significant gap in knowledge, which suggests that this research project is relevant to the field of the study; and Nsibidi symbols being incorporated in my ceramics practice is an aspect lacking in Nigeria contemporary ceramics practice (see Chapters 1 and 2).

6.3 CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO RESEARCH QUESTION 3 AND AIM 3

Question 3 What ceramics production methods or creative techniques/applications can be used for the conceptualization of forms which serve as a vehicle for Nsibidi cultural preservation?

Aim 3 To determine the ceramics production method, creative techniques, and application in my ceramics practice for the preservation of Nsibidi cultural symbols.

The research project set out to determine what potential practical process could be developed that combines form and surface expression in a unified state. The aim was to establish a range of creative processes that demonstrates the practical variables that combine form and Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration, in a state of recognition and appreciation. A range of initial tests was carried out before the results of the ceramic artifacts were successful (see Chapter 5). The artifacts achieved displayed a variety of different types of clay (earthenware clay, paper clay, porcelain and stoneware clay); and of surface expression from cutting, relief, incised, decal and transparent glaze for a smooth and shining surface.

The new ceramic form was born from Nsibidi symbols; this shape was created by assembling similar lines, which were carved from Nsibidi symbols for beauty, entrance, market, and track (see Figs. 47 and 48 in Chapter 5). The studio practice approach gave physical body to the new form; and this ceramic form was achieved through the pinching, coiling and slab method of ceramic production and presented the research artifacts in three- and two-dimensional forms. Exploring forms through a process of experimental investigation informed the research at an early stage; and these gave an informative insight towards the achieved ceramics pieces. Chapter 5 has explained the creative processes the research employed to adequately achieve the goal of the study. Reflective practice and purposeful observation were the principal approaches used in the formulation of materials and all artifacts. The research explores new ways of creating new form, the concept was direct representation of Nsibidi symbols, and the research artifacts (ceramic artworks) are purely conceptual and original; therefore it can be perceived as a new way of thinking, and there are possibilities of generating more form from Nsibidi symbols.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO RESEARCH QUESTION 4 AND AIM 4

Question 4 How might Nsibidi traditional symbols be integrated into Western material and practice?

Aim 4 To develop clay work that demonstrates Western concept/ideas, material and techniques for the enhancement of Nsibidi cultural heritage.

The concern of studio potters over the years has always revolved around individual style and professional practice. As part of a developing tradition of free self-expression in the contemporary ceramics world, my studio practice became a self-defining process, meaning every research artifact tells a story. Expressing my experiences through the research artifacts made from different Western materials positively enhances my cultural identity. Cardew believed that pottery should live and grow out of its own environment.

His inclination towards adopting environmental influences in ceramics is eloquently manifested in the works of his famous trainee Ladi Kwali, who took advantage of her new-found advanced technical knowledge to foster indigenous motifs of her immediate milieu in her works. In a similar perspective, the research has adopted Nsibidi cultural symbols from Nigeria and incorporated them into a Western environmental material (stoneware clay, porcelain clay, porcelain paper clay) and conceptualized forms that convey diverse ideas from the researcher's personal life experiences in Nigeria and the UK.

In respect of surface treatment, this research has explored applicational techniques with decal and transparent glaze for surface expression. The transparent glaze, decal, porcelain clay, porcelain paper clay and stoneware clay material are acting as a bridge between two cultures; Nsibidi cultural symbols used for surface expression originated from Nigeria, the materials used in producing the ceramic pieces being Western materials found in the research environment: the UK.

Incorporating the concept of incised and decal surface expression and the burnishing surface technique in the research project demonstrates a multiple method of ceramics production between Africa and the Western environment. In addition to the objective set out in the research project, a supplementary training for the use of decal and incised surface treatment during my studies was relevant; and this concept has been engaged in the research project (see Chapter 5, Figs. 63 and 65). The technique achieved further enhances the aesthetic of Nsibidi cultural heritage.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO MY ARTISTIC PRACTICE.

My engagement with the Western materials and techniques revealed their physical properties, and these have helped to develop my approach and practice much further than expected. Incorporating the idea and concept of incised and decal surface techniques with the conceptualized ceramic form further advanced the aesthetic of the research artifacts and my future works.

These techniques (incised and decal surface treatment) were the most important to me in my studio practice during my study, as they enhance and present the research artifacts in a new way, which is different from my previous clay-making practices.

The research's creative potential will continue to have a significant impact on my future artistic practice. The approaches used in the development of the new ceramic form have the potential to be broadened and developed further, to produce new bodies of works that will considerably progress this research effort. The artworks will be displayed in future exhibitions, and components of the project will be published. Creating new ceramic forms inspired by Nsibidi symbols is a new direction for my practice that will be expanded in the future. It was feasible to locate my practice by looking at the case study artists (as previously discussed in Chapter 4). The research has substantially improved and developed my own ceramics practice with the Western production methods, which will continue to have a major impact in the presentation of my ceramic works, as these worked with the combination of form and Nsibidi symbols in a narrative state.

6.6 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE.

The original contribution to knowledge that this research project offers comprises of:

1. The research offers a body of new ceramics art forms inspired by Nsibidi symbols, for surface expression. Furthermore, the research revealed new possible creative ways or ideas of creating new forms from an existing cultural symbol (see studio practice section 5.5).
2. The research offers a body of ceramic objects which explores the application of Nsibidi cultural symbols with the combination of narrative and interpretation of cultural symbols into its contemporary ceramics practice (as presented in section 5.6). It further recorded the processes which artists may find useful for preserving their own cultural meaning and heritage.

3. With the use of durable Western material and applications, the research adaptively produced clay works with Nsibidi symbols as surface decoration for Nsibidi cultural preservation (as explored in section 5.10). These cross-cultural artifacts are intended to be preserved in art galleries and museums for international awareness as both places preserve and hold historical art objects, which attract tourists to visit. The research artifact being kept in the museum will contribute to a better understanding of Nsibidi symbols found in Nigeria, by establishing a framework in which the symbols can be identified.

As a result of the global pandemic (COVID-19), I had difficulties in exhibiting due to travel and museum closures. My post-PhD intention therefore is to exhibit the research artifacts in the Nike cultural art gallery in Nigeria and the British Museum.

4. The research has also developed artifacts that demonstrate a modern UK narrative through materials and techniques, coupled with ancient African production ideas, for the enhancement of Nsibidi cultural heritage. The research explores a multiple method of ceramic production between Africa and UK which offers a unique approach to research and studio practice (as engaged in section 5.7).
5. The research offers a written document on Nsibidi symbols, with a self-narrative that contributes to a better understanding of Nsibidi symbols and those found in British Museum without documentation and artist statement (see section 5.5, p.120). I will visit the British Museum with the completed research to enhance the paucity of understanding with regards to the Nsibidi pieces in the British Museum.

During my visit to the British Museum, an oral invitation was offered, for me to bring my collected research work, as these will enhance the interpretation of Nsibidi on the calabash pieces donated to the museum in the year 1916 by art collectors. Reflecting on my PhD journey as an African researcher, the aims and objectives that were proposed at the outset of this research never included an aspect of contributing knowledge to an existing Nsibidi object in the British Museum (as examined in section 3.3). Therefore, the research has surpassed my expectations by achieving both the aims and objectives of the study and by

adding to the understanding and interpretation regarding Nsibidi objects found in the British Museum.

6.7 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the research, it became apparent that there were areas for further research. The implementation of these further research areas could go on to improve and extend innovation of a culturally based ceramic design and additional inquiry into form and surface in ceramics. Further studies can be carried out on Nsibidi symbols as expression in other creative disciplines, such as sculpture, industrial design and other traditional crafts. Nsibidi symbols as motifs, with their adaptative potentials, are not confined to pottery exploration, but may also be used in other forms of art.

The research will be of benefit to interior designers who are interested in a narrative artwork with visual attributes of both cultural symbols and ceramics practices. The study recommends inquiry into traditional pottery processes and techniques, with a view to establishing their links with indigenous proverbs and adages.

6.8 FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ARTWORKS

As discussed in Chapter 5, the research artifact established in this study reveals possible creative possibilities that could be developed and expanded upon. The use of ceramic wall pieces as a diary will require more research. It would also be of interest to work together with participants in the case study and other artists who are interested (see Chapter 4), to see how I can enhance my practice and to present the Nsibidi symbols to a wider audience for the sustainability and preservation of Nsibidi into the future.

6.9 FINAL REMARK

The aims and objectives set out at the start of this research have been met and, in some ways, they have exceeded my expectations. The contribution to knowledge includes a variety of advantages that others in the field may find interesting and useful in their art practice. The importance of conserving any new practice based on a people's culture cannot be overstated, since such activities play an important role in preserving people's cultural identity. As a result, a lack of culturally-based creativity can hinder a nation's restoration and progress. The innovation of a culturally-based ceramic design must be treated with importance, since ceramic practices as a tool have the power to preserve, reflect and promote cultural awareness (Nsibidi cultural symbols). We need to return to our own origins to stem the influence of the expanding universal culture. There is need for ceramic forms to express local identity for cultural preservation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Arochukwu Area – This is a local government area situated in Abia state in Nigeria. Abia state is among the 36 states in Nigeria.

Abba Ahuwan – He was trained at Michael Cardew's Abuja Pottery Centre in the 1960s. Studied ceramics at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in Nigeria. His experiments in burnished and smoked pot sculptures that made references to northern Nigerian architecture, musical instruments and traditional Hunkuyi decorative shapes in the 1980s.

Ahmadu Bello University – This is a university founded in 1962, located in Zaira local government area of Kaduna State in Nigeria.

Auchi Polytechnic – This is a federal government academic institution founded in 1963, located in Edo state of Nigeria.

Benjo Igwilo – An American-trained Igbo ceramicist, who joined the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1973. In the 1970s, he championed a substantial development at Nsukka, by combining engobe ornamentation and glazes with the pottery shapes and techniques of the Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria. These were to extend the work of Michael Cardew and Ladi Kwali of the Abuja Pottery.

Benue River – This is the second largest river in Nigeria, located in Benue state, a region in Nigeria.

Benin Art – is the art from the kingdom of Benin or Edo empire, a pre-colonial African state in the southern part of Nigeria.

Chris Echeta – is one of Anatsui's students, who studied in ceramics at the University of Nsukka in Nigeria. He has worked with clay since 1979, producing political works. His selection of materials include clay, engobe, and glaze.

Chike Aniakor – is a Nigerian painter and art historian, trained at the Ahmadu Bello University. He lectured at the fine art department of the University of Nsukka in Nigeria in the 1970s, he contributed to the artistic ideology of the Nsukka art school through the creative idiom of Uli experiments in the 1980s.

Cross River State – is among the 36 states of Nigeria, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Its state capital is Calabar.

Ekpe Leopard – Ekpe leopard is another name for Leopard society by Ekoi people, speaking the Ejagham language in the Cross River State region in Nigeria. The leopard societies were a legislative, judicial, and executive power before colonisation, especially among the Efik, who exerted much influence over the Cross River State in Nigeria.

Ekpe Society – This is a secret society located in Cross River, Akwa Ibom State and Arochukwu area of Nigeria. The society consists of only males, who use Nsibidi symbols as a means of communication. Ekpe society is a significant part of the political system both in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States in Nigeria.

Ejagham – is a language spoken by the Ekoi people of Cross River State. The Ekoi people are also referred as Ejagham.

Efik – is a language spoken by the people of Calabar, the capital of Cross River State in Nigeria.

El Anatsui – is a sculptor from Ghana, who currently lives and works in Nigeria. He is now widely considered as the top modern African artist. In the late 1970s, he was known for his experiments with stoneware clay.

Emir Suleja – Emir is a high-ranking title for Muslim ruler. Suleja is a Hausa ethnic group located in Niger State in Nigeria. Therefore, Emir Suleja is a ruler of the Hausa ethnic group

Enugu State – This is among the 36 states in Nigeria, located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. They speak Igbo languages.

Gbagyi Area – is also known as Gwari, located in Niger State in Nigeria. They are the most populous ethnic group in Nigeria, with pottery and farming as their major occupation (practised by the women). Ladi Kwali is from Gwari area.

Ibibio –These are people mostly found in Akwa Ibom and Cross River State in Nigeria. They share culture and tradition with the Efik as their speaking language.

Igbo Ukwu Art – This is art associated with the Igbo cultural group located in Anambra state in Nigeria. They are the oldest bronze and ritual vessel artifacts known in west Africa.

Igbo Tribe – The Igbo Tribe are an ethnic group in Nigeria speaking the Igbo language. These people are mainly from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states in Nigeria.

Ife Art – These are Yoruba artists from Ife, a city located in Osun State in Nigeria. They developed a highly naturalistic sculptural tradition in stone, terracotta, brass and copper.

Ige Ibigbami – is a graduate of fine art, specializing in Ceramics, who graduated in 1969 from the University of Obafemi Awolowo in Oshun state of Nigeria. She introduced pottery into the University of Ile-Ife's curriculum.

Levi Yakubu – is better known as Dajo. He is a Tiv, native to Benue State. Dajo inherited a great ceramic legacy passed down through four generations of his family. He ascended from obscurity to prominence through hard labour and tenacity, eventually becoming the proprietor of Benue State's first pottery company. He is the current President and Chief Executive Officer of Dajo Pottery Limited.

Nsukka – This is a local government area in Enugu state in Nigeria.

Nok Art – This term relates to huge human, animal and other figures made out of terracotta pottery. Nok is a village in Kaduna state in Nigeria.

Ozioma Onuzulike – is from Achi in Enugu State in Nigeria. He is a clay artist of the 1980s and a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has been creating ceramic ware described as sculpture and also as objects of visual poetry.

Ruben Igbine – is a lecturer at Auchi Polytechnic, who in the 1980s produced a series of stoneware figurative sculptures that addressed genre themes and subjects.

South-South Region – This is a geopolitical zone in Nigeria consisting of 6 states, namely: Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and River.

South-East Region – This is a geopolitical zone in Nigeria consisting of 5 states, namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.

Traditional Hunkuyi – is a traditional decorative shape in the 1980s, designed and produced by Abba Ahuwan.

Tivs – These are a group of people from the Benue State region in Nigeria. Tiv is a name of their ancestor, from whom all are descended.

Uche Okere – led a group of students, known as the Zaria Rebels (see below) in 1958.

Uli – are traditional carved motifs, created by the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria. These designs are mostly abstract, consisting of linear lines and geometric shapes, with some figurative components.

Western Materials. Western materials in this research are referred to different clay bodies the researcher found in the UK, that are different from the earthen ware clay which she has been using in Nigeria for ceramics exploration. These Western materials include stoneware, porcelain, paper clay.

Yoruba Pottery – The Yoruba consist of six states of Nigeria, namely Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo and Kwara states. They are the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Their pottery is hand-built and often used as tools for traditional worship.

Zaria Rebels – This is an art society that was created in Zaria, and its purpose was mainly to reject any academic programme that had little or no African content.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW THROUGH EMAIL WITH MAGDALENE ODUNDO.

1. EE: What is your origin? This question is an opportunity to know your cultural background, that makes you and your work unique. To know if your work is informed by certain concepts or themes from your background, childhood, socio-economic status, where you lived or were raised. Has cultural experience informed your practice?

MO: I was born in Nairobi, Kenya. I am pretty sure that growing up in Kenya and being educated in India, Kenya and the UK, will have influenced the work that I have made over the last 40+ years.

2. EE: What is your educational background and any experiences that may have contributed to your evolution as an artist?

MO: Education is a very broad term. Education can mean being schooled or learning through life's experience. If you mean being educated via institutions, then yes, learning through tuition will have contributed to the knowledge passed down in a rote system. If education is measured through a living experience, then the skills that I have acquired in this manner will have been embedded in my work through my international travels and diasporic living.

3. EE: Why do you make artworks in the first place?

MO: This is my chosen career and profession.

4. EE: Describe your experience creating your artwork using a variety of methods, techniques and materials?

MO: This is a very difficult question to answer in short form. The methods, techniques, and materials I work with have been widely documented. Have a look at The Journey of Things- Magdalene Odundo

5. EE: What does your work says or aim to communicate? From what inspired you, in what manner will you expect viewers to consider your artwork? The purpose of this question is to know what your audience sees in your work.

MO: I do not think I have worked from the premise of attempting to make much philosophical rhetoric in my artwork. What I have tried to communicate in the work is the historical continuity of what it is to make objects as part of a human expression.

6. EE: What is the evaluation of your work in terms of appearance, meaning and preservation?

MO: I do not think it is very easy for me to evaluate my work for the viewer. This is the work for critics, art historians, and the public.

7. EE: In the place of African Art, what is the extension and preservation of your artworks?

MO: Ceramics/Pottery is a very universal medium, the material objects made in, especially, clay has a universality that is probably understood by all. It is one art form that does not require detailed explanation. Pottery has existed if humans have.

8. EE: How does your work comment on current or past social or political issues?

MO: It is what it is. It is contemporary because I am making it now. It is political in its metaphorical abstraction.

9. EE: What attributes of cultural symbolism are found on your artworks? Does your artwork expose your personal or cultural identity?

MO; So much has been written regarding symbolism and cultural associations in my work. I like to think that I can leave such extractions and meaning in the work to the viewer, the critic, and the art historians to assess.

10. EE: Who are your biggest influencers? The reason for this question is because every artist has a handful of other artists they look to for inspiration and guidance.

MO: The biggest influence in my work has been historical, antiquities, and early works. This is because I am fascinated by the cycle of life, especially that of human beings. I am fascinated by ritual and ceremonies that we attach to birth, youth, marriage, death, and funerals. This is so well displayed through archaeological discoveries, and contemporary and social anthropology. These rituals are also universal and exemplified in all living creatures. Practically all living species practice rites and rituals around life cycle stages.

11: EE: What current art world trends are you following? Do your artworks respond to art trends at all?

MO: Does your work have a direct impact on your community or challenge social issues? I have never aspired to follow any fashionable trends in my work. I have concentrated on exploring aspects of humanity that is so possible when you work with materials that allow you to model the essence of what it is to be human. Clay plasticity and simplicity say so much within a very long-time lapse. It is this malleability that is so present in our human psyche that enables a potter to model the spirit of humanity and make utilitarian objects at the same time. Clay can also be a very challenging material to use and for this reason has a great impact as an object that mediate between oneself and the wider world.

12. EE: How has living and working in the UK shaped your practice? has it had any effect on your cultural identity and artistic development? I ask this question as I am undertaking research and creating artwork in the UK.

MO: Making work in clay and establishing myself as a ceramic artist has enabled me to strengthen my cultural identity. Clay has been a very positive experience for me. When I came to England, I had trained in commercial and advertising art. I discovered the art of making pottery on my foundation course at Cambridge and so became a ceramic artist.

APPENDIX 3: A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR EKPUK

1. EE: Give me some background on Nsibidi. What is it, how much do you know about it, what has been the impact of Nsibidi on your work? And how have you utilised the Nsibidi symbols on your work?

VE: Nsibidi is an ancient form of sacred communication used by the Ibibio, Efik, Ejagham and Igbo peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria, which is widely practiced by male secret societies.

The Ekpe society uses Nsibidi primarily for Africa's indigenous writing systems. These secret communication codes include mime, voices, placement of items and graphical symbols. Only those who had been initiated understood the significant of these codes. Some of these signs have been commercialised and are now used for making public notices and preserving records. Though I don't understand a wide range of the Nsibidi symbols

Nsibidi, on the other hand, is a well-kept secret in my society. Nsibidi was frequently practiced among members of the Ekpe and Ekpo secret organisations when I was a child. During ceremonial rites, some Nsibidi signs were inscribed as adornment on the bodies of maidens. My knowledge of Nsibidi is based on documented anthropological archives, Over the past years, what I have learnt about Nsibidi symbols has great impact and has given my work a direction as a visual artist.

- 2 EE: You did mention employing Nsibidi signs and your own writing symbols to create a narrative in your work. Are you using Nsibidi as a human to create debate or discussion through interpretation that are based on your experience and ideas?

VE: My storyline in structuring my framework is not particularly Nsibidi; rather, it is a constructive writing, that is not supposed to be literally read but experienced completely. Though there are recognisable Nsibidi symbols in my story.

- 3 EE: What is the significance of drawing in black and white script symbols? Or do you wish to express a sense of contrast or contrast in human interaction?

VE: In my most recent works, I've opted to return to sketching being the foundation of my arts. My experimental drawings are a separate painting expression, the idea is to convey simple effective lines, be it black or white on a space. But colours are most times employed to complement the drawing in most situations. Audience may be attracted to the painting due to an aesthetics affinity or the themes attributed to the art piece. I don't create work to manipulate how viewers react to it.

- 4 EE: I noticed you work with a variety of materials; the message you portray – does it determine your materials?

VE: I enjoy experimenting with various art mediums, my idea is against drawing being portrayed in a traditional manner. I wonder what result will be produced by drawing on pottery pieces, or clay on paper, etc. Most times, the idea you intend to communicate determines the materials; at other times, I allow the art piece to decide what art material fits best.

- 5 EE: Outside your first degree being in painting, as a child did you demonstrate any creative ideas as related art? Did anyone influence you?

VE: Far back as I can recall, I draw human beings and objects as they are. My mother believes I was the first nurturer of my artistic talent. She encouraged me to participate in competitions from an early age. My enthusiasm for painting was so intense that I couldn't read another course and family supported me – that's something I am grateful for. In Nigeria, I was exposed to diverse traditional designs and ideologies, like Uli Nsibidi symbols and many others, which impacted my artworks. Agbo Folarin and Obiora Udechukwu: their art works greatly inspired me in my own artistic career.

- 6 EE: You were born in Nigeria and now reside in Washington, DC. In your journey, are there things that have inspired you which are incorporated in your works?

How has living and working in the United States influenced your practice? Has it influenced your cultural identity or artistic development? I raise this question since I am conducting study and creating artwork in the United Kingdom.

VE: If you are an immigrant from somewhere, going to a new place adds to your identity each time you experience or reside somewhere new. Yes, I did not grow up in the United States, but becoming an American citizen adds to the sense of my identity, which is, as I have worked out, we continue to be a lot of things at different times. So, in terms of how my time in America has influenced my work, it has done so in a variety of ways, but not in a negative way. Yes, it suggests that I am experiencing a different atmosphere, a different cultural context, than I would if I lived in Nigeria. When I lived in Nigeria, my work was influenced by a variety of cultural heritages and expressions of the human condition, which substantially influenced and contributed to my work.

- 7 EE: You highlighted some important attributes to gender, culture, family, politics and one's identity. How was your attention drawn to these issues?

VE: I think it can be linked to me being human, my compassion to others feels natural as a result of our affection for each other. Analytically, human behaviours and observations attract my attention, which manifests itself in my work.

- 8 EE: How have Nsibidi symbols and meaning inspired your art works?

VE: An examination of Nsibidi cultural symbols reveals techniques of communication in which the substance of my thoughts and expression are portrayed in an abstract form. Applying these unique concepts in an abstracted manner establishes a personal language which evokes interactions between art and creative writing, are transparent and incompressibility are symbols for my current interpretation.

- 9 EE: What led you to Nsibidi symbols?

VE: Since symbols are conceived arbitrary patterns, I am fascinated by humans' capacity to distil thoughts to its simplicity in artworks for benefit of interactions.

- 10 EE: In what way do you express meaning with Nsibidi symbols?

VE: My works do not always, if ever, express direct messages. Depending on the subject matter of the composition, writing systems seen in my works may or may not be included with recognized signs. In general, my style is influenced by Nsibidi writing, though the reading differs from each stroke contained in my painting.

APPENDIX 4

EVALUATION REVIEW FROM UMANA NNOCHIRI

Umana Nnochiri <umanannochiri@gmail.com>

To:

Elizabeth Esege

Thu, Nov 11 at 9:21 AM

Evaluation of the conceptualization of ceramic Form and Surface: Nsibidi Cultural Preservation in Nigeria by Umana Nnochiri

I am delighted to evaluate this work because it has extended the thread of cultural resource on nsibidi. In the South East region of Nigeria where nsibidi originated, it has been relegated to the background and is almost going extinct with minimal presence in very few places. This study is a synthesis of two art forms translating a two dimensional cultural/ancient art into a three-dimensional contemporary art form which is of utmost importance and current relevance. The subject of this study not only summarizes the theme and topic but also delves into the medium of execution which is ceramics and the style employed. The work is a fusion of the philosophical and skills development with a high level of proficiency displayed in crafting each ceramic piece. This study effectively combines the visual elements and principles of design by use of lines, linear, asymmetrical, forms and shapes to create art. Not only is the assemblage of the forms drawn directly from the nsibidi, but the decoration also employs the cultural ideographs using various artistic techniques of etching, engraving, moulding, drawing, glazing and direct painting.

The visual organization of each piece is a product of deep thoughts, imagination and inventive creativity which perceives old things in new ways and results in patterns which create a relationship between the past and the present. I feel that the earth colour which is the principal colour of the ceramic pieces is deliberate in order that the cultural tinge is maintained. The content and meanings communicated as message by each piece is very clear and helps the appraisal of the worth and import of the ceramic art in this study. The form is fluid and creates an affinity in the observer/audience to interrogate for more meaning. Ultimately, the work satisfies the purpose for which it was created.

Umana Nnochiri (Ph.D)

Cross River University of Technology- CRUTECH

Senior lecturer in Textile,

Consultant on Carnival costumes and cultural matters

APPENDIX 5

EVALUATION REVIEW FROM CHRIS ECHETA

chris echeta <echetachris@yahoo.com>

To:

lizydon2002@yahoo.com

Elizabeth Esege

Sat, Oct 16 at 1:43 AM

Evaluation for the conceptualization of ceramic Form and Surface: Nsibidi Cultural Preservation in Nigeria by Chris Echeta

Nsibidi" is a socio-historical reality. The images here in the research, are "soft-spoken" in their poise, quiet yet loud, stable yet dynamic. This is the paradox that sustains this creative enterprise. The research is a successful attempt in casting nsibidi in "stone".

"Casting in stone" as a figure implies preservation, permanence, and indelibility.

The works, by design, have this unspoken similarity which presents a stylistic flow, yet each preserves its identity through titling and configuration. The researcher seems to approach her finishing by attempting to approximate Magdalene Odundo's burnishing technique yet unique in her formal presentation. Magdalene relies mostly on roundedness and astonishing circularity but this researcher, in pursuit of her creative identity, relies on and employs blunt cubical presentations for her images.

The dynamism of the "Family ties", a three-member wall assembly, actually tied the family towards one direction with penguin visual impression in their 'armless' configuration.

The research not only brought the researcher's life experiences along, it exhibited her aspirations for family unity in the same "Family ties". Her Ph.D journey received a mention in her creative narrative where she knitted together in her embroidery of images tied together using the nsibidi symbolism as a vehicle whose destination is clear.

Professor Chris Echeta,
Federal University of Lafia,
Professor of Ceramics.
Art historian, writer, and poet.

APPENDIX 6

EVALUATION REVIEW FROM JOHN AGBERIA

John Agberia <jtagberia@yahoo.com>

To:

lizydon2002@yahoo.com

Elizabeth Esege

Sat, Nov 27 at 18:25 PM

EVALUATION FEEDBACK FOR ELIZABETH ESEGE

Contextual Analysis of Form and Unity of Nsibidi Cultural Symbols and its Preservation in Nigeria

Introduction

Let me humbly begin from the topic Nsibidi which originally focuses on the cultural relativity of cursive symbol systems of the Ekoi/Ejagham people mostly found or occupying the Cross River basin of Nigeria, bordering the Western fringes of Cameroon which has elaborately spread to other areas of Efik-Ibibio, the surrounding Igbo communities of Arochukwu and Ohafia that bordered west of the basin. All these are signifier to the very traditions of cultural identity and relativity of modern rebirth manifestly alluded to in Victor Ekpuk's lines and signs that represents the uncommon placements of tradition, culture and art.

These arts of designing, in particular, represents an unusual phenomenon, a sort of architectural models and structures erected on cultural artifacts of the ancient which are today being innovated with meanings. We are told these signs and symbols propels the past into the present with imbued intellectual meanings.

It is with this background synthesis that Elizabeth Esege's foray into the Nsibibi study in ceramics and , an added voice to the ongoing narrative as it provides a widely and liberal perspective to its symbolism. The ceramic forms being studied provide a fetish ground purposefully representative of ancient and modern narrative. And as architectural models they symbolize meaning-seeking understanding of dynamic intellectual constructs. As Toyin Falola posited in a comprehensive treatise "Victor Ekpuk: Connecting Lines Across Space and Time", signs cohere and must fit and be adapted, as if they must obey the laws of gravity and the mystical laws of measurement" we are drawn to the reality that adaptation with meaning provides the core value of life.

The basis of research questions in any research is to reduce doubts and provide clear logical reasoning to the stated objectives and be able to find cogent answers to the stated problem of the study. The question raised by the researcher is in tandem with the stated aim of the research which is to conceptualize ceramic forms of Nsibidi as surface expression for cultural preservation. There is no doubt that ceramics form represents the ancient and modern and as such deserves a greater understanding of its form and function. Hence, the imputation of dynamic intellectual meaning lines, signs, and symbols characteristic of the innate desires to accentuate and beautify its form and function.

Discussion and Conclusion

In discussing the concept of Esege's ceramic form from the perspective of Nsibidi cultural fore-bodying, one is tempted to see a new perspective of a pottery art playing a quintessential role of art for art sake as viewed from William Straite Murrey and the functionalist potters such as Michael Cardew whose modernist perspective transformed the popular Abuja pottery in Nigeria into an industrial and perhaps commercial product. My book on Ladi Kwali: A Study of Indigenous and Modern Techniques of Abuja Pottery amplified this thought processes, where Michael Cardew significantly established a rural pottery in Suleja -Abuja, Nigeria and gave it international visibility and acceptance.

The significance of that pottery development was not necessarily on the new pottery forms produced, but the acculturation of the pottery forms with motifs from the environment which were mainly graphical and geometrical elements of linear and curvilinear emblems as well as figurative and zoomorphic elements. These emblems range from butterfly, birds, lizards, chameleon, and wall geckos. Similarly, the Nsibidi cursive symbols which Esege is appropriating as her research forms are an array of a body of dynamic intellectual knowledge for developing new ceramic forms in an academic and cultural setting. For Esege's, research, it is a new creative oeuvre that can significantly contribute to knowledge, particularly, viewed from the angle of an African narrative in modernist scholarship and further preserved its cultural heritage (Nsibidi).

Qualification/ Status

John Tokpabere Agberia, PhD

BA (Benin), MA (Ibadan), PhD (UPH)

Professor of Fine Arts & Design,
Department of Fine Arts and Design
University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt, Nigeria

- A.G. Leventis Research Fellow (SOAS, London) 1995
- Sainsbury Research Fellow (UEA, Norwich) 1997
- Commonwealth Oxford Titular Fellow (Oxford) 2009
- CAA-Getty Scholar & Fellow (N.Y) 2018

APPENDIX 7

EVALUATION REVIEW FROM BABSON AJIBADE

Babson Ajibade <babson.ajibade@yahoo.com>

To: lizydon2002@yahoo.com

Elizabeth Esege

Thu, Nov 25 at 15:10 PM

Office of the Director of Academic Planning

UNIVERSITY OF CROSS RIVER STATE

PMB 1123, Calabar

24.11.2021

Elizabeth Esege's Conceptualization of Form and Surface in Unity: Nsibidi

Cultural Preservation in Nigeria: An Evaluation.

Many years ago, Elizabeth was my BA student in Ceramics, at Cross River University of Technology (now University of Cross River State). From her early years in school, the scope, quality and diversity of her works drew the attention of all her lecturers. We found her a very diligent candidate, because of the quality time she put into her studio practices, and also because of the beautiful works she made from cultural materials such as the Nsibidi symbols of Cross River State.

Easily the best ceramic student at her graduation, it was a unanimous decision to retain her as Graduate Assistant in Ceramics.

It was to my delight, when she informed me that her PhD project deals with the Nsibidi symbols. What makes her work on the Nsibidi delightful is not just because of the aesthetics of the symbols. Rather, it is because the Nsibidi symbols and cultural meanings are fast being forgotten by today's public memory in Cross River State. With such vital and significant cultural attribute like Nsibidi fading out of public memory, it was a delight to know that Elizabeth was adding her academic and studio "voice" to the rekindling and preservation of the Nsibidi symbols. In her own words, her work will "return Nsibidi to the people, where it originally belonged and reaffirm it once more as a cultural resource that can be accessed". In line with this, Elizabeth's PhD works explore how "ceramic forms and symbols [can] contribute to Nsibidi cultural preservation". Using what she terms a "self-defining process", in her works, she adopts Nsibidi symbols in re/creating visual narratives of her life experiences in her practice. Exploring the hand building technique, Elizabeth's works are definitely a sort of identity negotiation, in which the artist uses new materials (like paper clay, porcelain, and stoneware clay, decal, and transparent glaze) to incorporate African Nsibidi symbols into an ostensibly Western cultural environment. What comes out is not essentially a hybrid, but a fresh kind of energetic visual form that fulfils both a cultural function back home, and a rich social function in her new spaces of UK life.

As one who has researched an aspect of the Nsibidi previously, and looking at the specimens of Elizabeth's works, they indicate a certain subtle plasticity that transcends the cultural confines of the African visuality, and imbued with an otherness of new materialities, which give the created forms fresh energy. And, by using new global materialities to inform the creation of ceramics inspired from her local culture, she has successfully re/created works that are trans-local.

They are trans-local because they neither are truly local nor are they ostensibly global. They straddle the two realms and the in-betweens of transnational sociocultural spaces.

From the works I see in the collection, Elizabeth has fully matured as an emerging ceramist. I say this on the strength of the critical analysis put forward above, from the basis of what I knew and now know about her artistic becoming. In the becoming I glean from Elizabeth's collections, her works and forms express local, global, and in-between identities and, thus, preserve the Nsibidi cultural symbols for all times and spaces. In this unique sense, her works definitely indicate that she has succeeded far beyond her original research aims and objectives.

Thank you.

Prof. Babson Ajibade

Director of Academic Planning,

+2348025068692; babson.ajibade@yahoo.com