

VISUAL NARRATIVES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN RIVERS STATE: A STUDY ON THE USE OF GROUNDNUT PEELS, SAWDUST, AND PIGMENTS IN PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

This study explores visual narratives of the COVID-19 pandemic in Rivers State, Nigeria, through mixed-media painting using groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigments. Given the high value placed on health in Rivers State, there is a need to document the pandemic experience and sensitize the public on its effects, preventive measures, and possible strategies to mitigate future outbreaks. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted businesses, social functions, and economic activities worldwide, including in Rivers State. In response, this study visually communicates the impact of the pandemic and promotes public awareness by analyzing paintings that depict preventive measures against the virus, targeting both urban and rural populations. Artists responded to the crisis through creative expression, using unconventional materials to document the pandemic's socio-cultural and economic effects, employing a mixed-media technique to create textured paintings that go beyond conventional painting materials such as oil, acrylic, and gouache. By incorporating groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigments, the research seeks to innovate within the realm of contemporary art while enhancing the aesthetic and textural appeal of visual storytelling. The study is anchored on emphasizing the emotional and expressive potential of art in engaging public consciousness. Findings reveal that the synergy of groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigments in painting effectively enhances textural depth and creates compelling visual narratives that documents the pandemic experience. The study concludes that COVID-19 remains a serious health threat, reinforcing the importance of preventive measures. It further recommends the exploration of unconventional art media for expanded artistic expression and knowledge production. Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse on visual storytelling in public health awareness and broadens the scope of mixed-media experimentation in contemporary painting.

Keywords: Visual Narratives, COVID-19, Groundnut Peels, Sawdust, Pigments, Pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic altered global interactions, affecting social, economic, and cultural structures. Artists responded by documenting experiences and emotions through visual narratives. In Rivers State, Nigeria, artists incorporated locally available materials such as groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigments to depict pandemic-related themes. This study explores how these materials were used to enhance artistic storytelling and sustainability. Rivers State has suffered several health challenges, from which COVID-19 is not exempted. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus (Awuse 2023). 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold. Symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath (CDC 2020). In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was first reported in Wuhan, China, in 2019.

The disease spread quickly in epic proportions to over 26 countries within 8 weeks, prompting the WHO to declare it a pandemic on 11 March 2020 WHO (2020). The pandemic has taken its toll on virtually every country in the world, including Nigeria, which recorded its first case in February 2020 and has since gone on to record over 50,000 cases (as of 18 August 2020). Rivers State is in the South-South region and is a major economic area known for crude oil exploration; the region has experienced close to over 2000 cases (as of 18 August 2020) following its index case identified on 25 March 2020. Rivers State is ranked fifth among the high-burden states in Nigeria (NCDC 2020).

As it is with any epidemic of an infectious nature panic, fear and misconceptions are rife. This is more so with COVID-19 because at the time the current study was conducted, there was no vaccine or specific cure for the disease. Coronavirus disease is known to be highly infectious but with a low national case fatality rate of 2.1% compared with other epidemic diseases that have impacted the country, like Ebola virus (42.1%) and Lassa fever (20.9%). A similar picture of misinformation, poor knowledge regarding the disease outbreak and negative behaviours was observed during the Ebola epidemic of 2014, which led to a lot of harmful practices being carried out by people attempting to remain safe. A study performed in China in the early stages of the pandemic showed good knowledge and practice of preventive measures against COVID-19, with 98% of respondents wearing a face mask when going out. However, in Nigeria, while most people identified radio as their main source of information on COVID-19, they attributed the disease to one affecting only the affluent and could not be bothered with practicing preventive measures in the face of economic hardship during the lockdown.

As with other respiratory infections like the flu or the common cold, public health measures are critical to slow the spread of illnesses. Public health measures are everyday preventive actions that include: staying home when sick; covering mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of used tissue immediately; washing hands often with soap and water; and cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects. The novel human coronavirus disease COVID-19 has become the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic, the Spanish flu epidemic began toward the end of the Great War (1914-18), later called world war 1.

That period saw the start of the fulfilment of Bible prophecies regarding "the last days." This prophecy mentions horrific food shortages, great earthquakes, increasing lawlessness, and a remarkable deterioration of human values. No doubt you are aware of those very conditions in the world today (Awake, 2005). The medical journal *Vaccine* reported in 2003: "It has been 35 years since the last influenza pandemic, and the longest interval between pandemics recorded with certainty is 39 years." The article continued: "The pandemic virus may emerge in China or a nearby country and could include surface antigens or virulence factors derived from animal influenza viruses".

According to Anne (2017), The *Vaccine* article predicted concerning the virus: "It will spread rapidly throughout the world. Several waves of infection will occur. Morbidity will be extensive in all age groups, and there will be widespread disruption of social and economic activity in all countries. Excess mortality will be evident in most if not all age groups. World morbidity, or the rate of illness, was extraordinarily high in 1889–1890. Although precise figures will never be known (if only because many cases of influenza were never reported), it is a reasonable guess that between a third and a half of the world's population may have been ill with influenza at some time between October 1889 and October 1890. Although influenza was usually a mild infection whose mortality rate was very low, the vast numbers affected in this pandemic meant a large number of deaths. Often, influenza led to death when pneumonia joined it. David Patterson, a modern historian, has estimated that the 1889–1890 influenza pandemic killed between 270,000 and 360,000 people in Europe (Hays, 1938). It is unlikely that health care systems in even the most economically developed countries will be able to adequately cope with the demand for health care services." (Awake, 2005). The disease caused by the novel coronavirus, subsequently named

SARS-CoV-2 were first reported by officials in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019. Retrospective investigations by Chinese authorities have identified human cases with onset of symptoms in early December 2019 (WHO, 2020).

While some of the earliest known cases had a link to a wholesale food market in Wuhan, some did not. Many of the initial patients were either stall owners, market employees, or regular visitors to this market. Environmental samples taken from this market in December 2019 tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, further suggesting that the market in Wuhan City was the source of this outbreak or played a role in the initial amplification of the outbreak (WHO, 2020). The market was closed on 1 January 2020. SARS-CoV-2 was identified in early January and its genetic sequence shared publicly on 11-12 January.

The full genetic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 from the early human cases and the sequences of many other viruses isolated from human cases from China and all over the world since then show that SARS-CoV-2 has an ecological origin in bat populations. All available evidence to date suggests that the virus has a natural animal origin and is not a manipulated or constructed virus. Many researchers have been able to look at the genomic features of SARS-CoV-2 and have found that evidence does not support that SARS-CoV-2 is a laboratory construct (WHO, 2020). If it were a constructed virus, its genomic sequence would show a mix of known elements. Another coronavirus, SARS-CoV-1, the cause of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, was also closely related to other coronaviruses isolated from bats. These close genetic relations of SARS-CoV-1, SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses, suggest that they all have their ecological origin in bat populations. Many of these coronaviruses can also infect several animal species. For example, SARS-CoV-1 infected civet cats and then humans, while the virus causing the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) is found in dromedary camels, and has continued to infect humans since 2012 (WHO, 2020).

The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and the virus has now spread to many countries and territories. While a lot is still unknown about the virus that causes COVID-19, we do know that it is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing) Individuals can also be infected from touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). While COVID-19 continues to spread it is important that communities take action to prevent further transmission, reduce the impacts of the outbreak and support control measures.

The protection of children and educational facilities is particularly important. Precautions are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in school settings; however, care must also be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus this also include the villages, rural and urban areas. It is important to remember that COVID-19 does not differentiate between borders, ethnicities, disability status, age or gender. Education settings should continue to be welcoming, respectful, inclusive, and supportive environments to all. As with any epidemic, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has evoked panic, fear and misconceptions. The risk communication pillar of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre is responding to the pandemic by facilitating correct and consistent information to enable the adoption of behaviors to prevent and control COVID-19. Mixed media technique to produce paintings that express visual sensitization and awareness of COVID-19 in Rivers State.

Art as a Medium of Social Documentation

Art has long served as a vehicle for recording historical events (Berger, 2020). During pandemics, artists have used their works to convey emotions, social injustices, and survival strategies (Smith, 2021). The use of indigenous materials in art adds layers of meaning, connecting artworks to cultural and environmental contexts. Okachi and Ohambele (2018) states that art immortalizes people, places, and events. Artists create a visual record of life experiences commemorating the memorable and challenging social injustices, such as slavery and abuses, in

time. Artists serve as historians in this role, documenting life on canvas, photography, or sculpture. Art may be used to express chaos and misunderstanding, or to establish order from what appears to be chaos. Art helps us interpret and organize our world, offering insights into our own and others' societies and cultures. It serves as an intellectual stimulant, advancing civilization by provoking thought, introspection, and discussion. Art prompts emotions artists use subject matter, colour, and texture to evoke feelings, enabling catharsis or uncovering previously unrecognized emotions.

Art also has the power to elevate the commonplace, lifting viewers beyond reality into imagined worlds. It can serve as an escape, as seen in cartoons and comics, or juxtapose fantasy with reality, creating a vision of an ideal world as imagined by the artist. This transformative ability of art highlights its significance in shaping perspectives and inspiring change. Art communicates across all cultures, tells the stories of the past and present, and inspires minds, both young and old (StudyMode, 2010).

Art generally is a sense of communication; it allows people from different cultures and different times to communicate with each other via images, sounds and stories (Okachi and Ohambele, 2018). Art is often a vehicle for change. It can give voice to the politically or socially disenfranchised. A song, film or novel can rouse emotions in those who encounter it, inspiring them to rally for change. Painting, sculpture, music, literature and the other arts are often considered to be the repository of a society's collective memory. Art also has utilitarian influences on society (Omokanye, 2017). Contemporary Nigerian artworks and artists today do not only celebrate, embrace or engage in aesthetic values, but are message carriers of challenging issues of life. These artists contribute to their society by employing creative works that are capable of pricking the conscience of anyone. Examples of such artists is Awuse Enyinda whose painting carries a message for posterity sake thus, mitigating the immediate challenges within the environment in time.

Visual Narratives of COVID-19 in Nigeria

Several Nigerian artists created works that reflect the social and economic impact of COVID-19. These visual narratives include images of lockdown experiences, frontline workers, and themes of hope and despair (Okonkwo, 2021). The use of groundnut peels and sawdust in Rivers State artists' works highlights both creativity and adaptability. Below are some of the thumbnail sketches showing activities that happen during the covid-19.



Fig. 1 Artist: Enyinda Awuse

Title: Stay Free
Medium: pen on paper
Size: 9 x 8 inches
Year: 2022



Fig. 2

Artist: Enyinda Awuse
Title: The assessment
Medium: Pen on paper
Size: 9 x 8 inches
Year: 2022



Artistic Techniques and Material Use

Awuse developed innovative techniques to integrate groundnut peels and sawdust into paintings. Some mixed sawdust with pigments to create textured backgrounds, in the same vein he used groundnut peels as collage elements to add depth to his compositions as shown below.

Plate: 1

Artist: Enyinda Awuse

Title: Stay Safe

Medium: Groundnut peels, Sawdust and Pigment

Size: 36 X 48 inches

Year: 2022

The inspiration for producing this work was achieved from the educational values derived from depicting how imperative it is for all COVID-19 measures can be observed in other to stay safe. In our country Nigeria, there are a lot of challenges caused by the virus COVID-19, especially when people can't fully understand the extent of how deadly this virus can be if not avoided; however, the societies also has a role to play in educating the people more about COVID-19 measures in other to protect themselves and their loved ones. But having been influenced by some groups of individuals who are not adequately informed about this virus (COVID-19), they get exposed to the virus. These problems has lead to early death. To avoid that, the researcher used groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment to document the painting with the title stay safe.

However, the actual reason for documenting COVID-19 pandemic experience is to help people know the challenges faced and also to use it as an avenue to educate the people on the measure to take to stay safe. This was achieved using groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment to portray the painting stay safe. Thus, the Chinese says a picture tells a thousand words, capturing different forms, shapes, lines for adequate composition.

The title, structure, and composition of the portrait painting originated from the present COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Nigeria. The design and composition of the painting were carefully composed to showcase the painting titled stay safe. The skillful composition and arrangement of the image express a detailed representation of stay safe by using groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment in producing the painting stay safe to communicate broadly without introduction or conclusion to the content and message for which it was made.

Structurally, this painting work depicts stay safe and how it has positively influenced the audience that individuals needs to stay safe to prevent the virus COVID-19 from spreading out to more people so that individuals won't get infected by this disease. By so doing, together, we can overcome this and come out stronger.

The mixed media technique was carefully used in the production of this painting to deliver the purpose and usefulness of the method in providing the subject matter for COVID-19. The basic materials used for producing the painting were groundnut peels, sawdust, pigment, canvas, scissors, adhesive, hammer, and stapler, among others. The process involved in producing the painting titled stay safe was tasking and vigorous. Pasting the groundnut peels and the sawdust in a well-arranged manner on the canvas with adhesive was very difficult. And the adhesive used for the production of stay safe was (jet bond), an adhesive glue. Reasonably, the use of a frame in this research work is for aesthetic beautification and excellent finishing. Structures are also considered a part of the materials for studio development.

The effect of color and its application in this painting, is essential in enacting any painting artwork. The color scheme adopted for this portrait painting enhances and showcases activities within the health sector and basic was in which the constituted authority tried to ameliorate the

pressing health challenge in Nigeria, the painting is made of groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment painted with different colors so as to best illustrate and convey the message on how individual should stay free from COVID-19 virus. The colors on the background represent different individuals who have died during the process of COVID-19 and the different challenges people passed through during that period. And the bright hue color was used to highlight the dark areas to help project the main image. The researcher has helped capture COVID-19 experience through the mixed media technique building forms in painting.



Plate: 2

Artist: Enyinda Awuse
Title: The Assessment
Medium: Groundnut peels, Sawdust and Pigment
Size: 36 X 48 inches
Year: 2022

In Rivers State Nigeria, the people experienced a lot of challenges faced with COVID-19, especially when people can't completely understand how dangerous it could be if not avoided; regardless, the community also has a big role in educating the people about COVID-19 measures. In most cases, the effects and conditions of COVID-19 are not appropriately enlightened to people, which may resolve to death. To prevent this from happening, the researcher was able to use groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment to illustrate the work titled assessment portraying a hand bogging out holding a Non-contact infrared thermometer (NCITs) which he's using to measure the temperature of the woman to ascertain her health condition at a distance without touching her while measuring. From the image, you will also see a woman wearing a nose mask which the NCITs are being used on.

Anyway, the researcher's main reason is to enlighten the people of Rivers State and also as a means to educate others around the world on the safety measures to use the NCITs because it is very convenient for the workers to take the temperature of individuals or even their patients with severe illnesses. It also helps in reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19 disease among

people, and it is hygienic thereby it has had no contact needed, is easy to use, and is easy to clean. With this Rivers State can be free of COVID-19.

The title, structure, and composition of the portrait painting were developed during the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Rivers State. The technique used in sending the message of the painting was carefully created to showcase the assessment. The skilled composition of the portrait conveys an explicit expression of assessment by using groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment in producing the painting to communicate the content for which it was made.

Structurally, this painting symbolizes assessment and how it has impacted more knowledge on the audience that people need to use the Non-contact infrared thermometer (NCITs) as one of the measures to avoid COVID-19, and its spread. The NCITs will help protect individuals from getting infected by the virus. With this, Rivers State can be free and protected from Coronavirus disease.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic inspired artists in Rivers State to explore alternative materials for visual storytelling. Groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigments were effectively used to convey pandemic experiences while promoting sustainability. This study highlights the importance of innovation in art and its role in documenting history. Future research should explore the long-term impact of using organic materials in artistic practices. The result of the findings in the study revealed the effectiveness and need to document the COVID-19 pandemic experience in Rivers State as a means to sensitize the people on the measures to stay safe from the virus. Thus, this study requires strength and patience using the groundnut peels to achieve the painting. However, the use of the groundnuts required picking and gathering them up together and systematically placing them onto the prepared primed canvas with the help of an adhesive to depict the images assigned on the canvas. Most importantly, the study concluded that the thematic documentation of the COVID-19 pandemic experience in Rivers State: as a means of sensitization was able to document the different challenges that took place during the pandemic in Rivers State Nigeria.

Reasonably, the study concludes that the research has enlightened other painters and artists to explore more on the various mixed media techniques for the production of producing artwork. The achievement of this research has gravitated new ideas for further research on COVID-19 and other areas in visually documenting social, cultural, economic, and educational issues in our country for mixed media paintings using waste materials that painters overlook.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of the findings obtained in carrying out this study, subsequent the following recommendations are compelled.

- a. The study recommends that people should explore more mixed media techniques for visibility using groundnut peels, sawdust, and pigment.
- b. Endless investigation and experimentation with the use of mixed media art should be promoted when it comes to the production of aesthetics for educational purposes using waste materials.
- c. It also recommends that artists should be more reproductive when it comes to wasted materials in our environment. However, creating energy for the environmental revolution turned on waste materials.

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