

STUDIO PRACTICE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A CASE OF RESIST TECHNIQUES IN FABRIC DECORATION

Ali, Ruskana P.

Abstract

This paper discusses studio practice of resist techniques in fabric decoration and assesses its relevance based on the social, economic, cultural and technological values in the Nigerian society. Three prominent approaches in resist techniques have been identified that is: tie-dye, batik and starch resist. This presentation assesses the values of understanding resist methods in fabric embellishment in Nigeria, from the traditional and contemporary perspectives. In presenting these three approaches carried out, difficulties and prospects associated with the fore going were brought to light to serve as a springboard for self-realization and self-actualization.

Introduction

The paper centres on assessing the practices of the three approaches in resist techniques of fabric decoration in studio base and examines their values, problems/and prospects in the needs of Nigerian society such as springboard for self-reliance, job opportunities and innovation in hand crafted fabric decoration.

Objectives of the paper include;

- i) Presenting the tie-dye, batik and starch resist techniques, commonly practiced as studio based in Nigeria,
- (ii) Examining difficulties often experienced by practitioners in studio based resist techniques in fabric decoration in Nigeria,
- (iii) Assessing the contributions of resist techniques in fabric decoration to the social, economic and cultural development of rural and urban societies in Nigeria,
- iv) Identifying and documenting the prospects of hand crafted resist methods in fabric decoration in Nigerian society.

The paper sees the discussion in this presentation as a step towards developing interest towards the acquisition of skills for hand crafted resist techniques in fabric decoration in contemporary Nigerian society. Nkom (2006) stated that, creating interest and motivation are parts of the instruments for acquiring learning desire towards useful utilization and purpose.

Resist fabric decoration is viewed by this paper as part of practical approaches to useful vocational education for Nigerian society which seem not to have been adequately appreciated in the society. Eregba (2006), states that, to produce a better vision for the future, deliberate effort should be made to disseminate awareness, knowledge and consciousness amongst the citizenry. The demonstrations, discussions and documentation in this paper are viewed as efforts towards informing the Nigerian society of the values of resist techniques of fabric decoration. This paper is aware of similar documents on resist methods in fabric decorations whose discussions were on generality of the subject and therefore, restricted itself to these three approaches for clear demonstration, easy assimilation and practicability. The content of this paper are therefore, restricted to simple tie-dye, batik and starch techniques.

Background

Resist techniques as one of the processes in fabric decoration in textile design according to Gwarry (2004), is deliberate attempt by a dyer to prevent the penetration of dye solution from selected areas or portions of a fabric that is undergoing dyeing processes. This could be by tie-dye, batik or starch. Resist techniques in fabric decoration are traced to be one of oldest crafts in fabric decoration. Its exact origin is not clear, however, the popular view by most authors like Meilach (1976), Proud (1974) and Robinson (1969) is that, it was earlier practiced in Eastern part of the world especially in Indonesia (Asia) where it flourished greatly. African countries also have records of history in the technology. Few examples are mud cloth decoration known as Bokolafini, practiced in Mali, Adire (tie-dye) and Adire Eleko (Starch) in

Nigeria, Adinkra is the Ghana equivalent of Adire Eleko or starch resist. Other examples of resist techniques in different names can be found in Ghana, Benin, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote Divoire, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Upper Volta and Mali as well as Central African countries. Focuses are on the formal studio based techniques practiced in educational institutions, government/private organizations, as well as small and medium scale industries.

The Resist Techniques

Pre-Treatment

Fabrics purchased from the market always consist of sizing agents like starch, wax, grease, etc. derived as a result of the finishing process of manufacturing the fabrics. Pre-treatment is the process of removing such impurities in order to increase the ability of the fabric to absorb water and chemical reagents (Nkeonye, 1993). This can be achieved by washing the fabric in warm soapy (detergent) water. It is allowed to remain in the solution for 15 minutes before washing. The more purified the fabric, the sharper the shades obtained in dyeing (Oguntona, 1986). This process is applicable to all resist dyeing techniques.

Materials, Chemicals, Tools/Equipment for Resist Fabric Production

The basic materials required in the three resist production include: Fabric (cotton or linen), needles and yarns (thread) for stitching, twine and raffia for tying, clamping rods or objects, stove, kerosene and pot for boiling water, vessels (preferable plastic bowls) for dye solution, hand gloves for protecting the hands from the chemicals and dyes. Also required are: spoon, stirring rod (stick), brushes, squeegee, table, drawing instruments (e.g. pencil, paper, compass, etc), kettle and boiling ring where electricity is source of power supply.

Dyestuff, hydrosulphite, caustic soda (NAOH), lacquer/gelatin, alum, cassava flour, wax, beakers/smaller bowls, lino, straw board/zinc sheets, wooden stamp and cutting are also required.

Dye Bath Preparation and Wetting

The dye is prepared as follows: Dye stuff (vat dyes) - 2 heaped table spoons; Hydrosulphite - 4 heaped table spoons; Caustic soda - 3 heaped table spoons.

This mixed solution will conveniently dye five metres of fabric, while the ratio in mixing is: 1: 2: 1/2 meaning, one measure of dye, two of hydrosulphite, and one and one-half of caustic soda.

The dyes, hydrosulphite and caustic soda are poured into separate containers (bi-cup or plastic bowl) and dissolved with 1 litre of boiling water and stirred. They are then mixed together in one container before pouring it into a container with cold water. The water content after mixing should add up to 12 litres and stir properly.

Wetting Out

Fabrics for dyeing must be wet out before immersing into the dye-bath solution to insure a thorough and even dye saturation. This is done by soaking the fabric in warm or cold water for 3 to 5 minutes. It is removed and allowed to drip off.

Tie-Dye Techniques

As the name implies, it simply involves tying and dyeing some portions of the fabric through the use of string, raffia, twine or yarns (thread). It may also involve tying up small stones/pebbles, cork or seeds, etc.

There are several methods of patterning associated with tie-dye production. These include, straight folding, diagonal folding, cross diagonal, stitching and pulling to tie, etc. Patterns can also be achieved through the tying of small stones/pebbles and seeds.

After making the folds, it is then tied at specific intervals as desired. For the cross diagonal patterns, it requires folding the fabric from the different diagonal angles and dyeing the fabric two times.

The stitching method requires planning of the design by sketching on paper before transferring onto the fabric. An alternative is to draw directly on the fabric. It is stitched, pulled and then tied.

The fabric is ready for dyeing when all tying is completed. It is immersed into the dye-bath

ensuring that all parts are covered by the dye solution. Agitate regularly for even dyeing after every 5 minutes for a minimum of 30 minutes. The fabric is then brought out and hanged to drip and oxide. Having properly dripped it is then united and spread out for proper oxidation, washed and rinsed with clean water, dried, ironed and packaged for its useful end. It should be noted that for a concentrated dye-bath the amount of water is reduced by one third of the volume. For more than one colour the fabric would require a second or third typing and dye dipping.

Batik Techniques

The work Batik according to Meilach (1976) is Indonesian and means "wax writing". Java town in Indonesia is notable for batik techniques in fabric decoration. The process involves applying hot wax to fabric, which could be by printing with a metal block (tjap) or by trailing through a metal container with a fine spout (tjanting) or by painting with a brush (Proud, 1974).

The design is planned on paper and transferred onto the fabric by tracing or drawing directly onto the fabric. It is pinned onto a frame or spread on a table with newsprint paper beneath the fabric. If a table is used then the fabric has to be raised from time to time during the application while the wax is still warm to prevent sticking and cracking. Waxing will require heating the wax in a pot or deep saucepan until a trace hazy blue appears. It is then ready for application using brush or wooden stamp, etc.

The fabric is then immersed into the dye-bath, turned from time to time as in tie-dye but gently to avoid many crackles. It is removed and allowed to dry in a shade.

Removing the wax (de-waxing) involves the use of hot water or ironing under absorbent paper or newsprint. The hot water de-waxing is however the most effective method, while finishing is the same as for tie-dye.

Starch Resist

Starch resist is a technique that requires the use of cassava flour mixed to a thick paste cooked into starch and used as a resist agent. The process involves preparing a stencil using flat zinc sheet, alternatively straw board can be used but has to be reinforced with candle wax, oil paint or shellac or lacquer. A squeegee is used to print the paste, allowed to dry before dyeing.

Starch paste is prepared by cooking cassava flour. Firstly, about half litre water is brought to boil on a heat source, adding one tablespoon alum before it boils. Half-kilogram cassava flour is mixed into paste with half litre water. It is poured into the boiling while stirring to avoid lumps and stirred occasionally until it changes to a brownish colour (jelly consistency). It is brought down and allowed to cool for about 30 minutes before it can be used. The fabric is spread on a table or flat surface while the cut stencil is used to print the paste.

The starched-printed fabric is immersed into the dye-bath for about five minutes and their brought out to oxidize. To achieve the required shade desired, the process of dipping may be repeated one or two times.

Problems

Some problems associated with resist techniques include: inconsistency in design reproduction which might occur as a result of juxtaposition and superimposition of colour when complex folding, knotting, stitching and dyeing are employed (Gwarry, 2004). There is also the possibility to achieve 'mis-fit' with starch resist. Wax fires, burning of brushes are problems to be encountered as a result of wax overheating.

Poor quality dyes also affected colourfastness, thereby resulting in dull colour shades. Poor preparation of dye bath can affect poor resistant to the areas means to be protected. Unintentional patterns due to too much crackles and wax droppings. Studio based courses in institutions have cost implications in order to acquire the skills.

Contributions of Studio Practice Resist Technique to National Development

Resist techniques have been over the years, the traditional indigenous Art and Craft to different societies in Nigeria. Examples are the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria, where notable areas of traditional indigo dyeing include: Kano, Sokoto, Zaria. Others are Yoruba towns of Oshogbo, Ilorin,

Ondo, Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Oyo and Abeokuta (Richer, 1976).

This development has grown to the formation of different cooperative ventures most especially, in the southwest parts of Nigeria where every female member takes part for self-reliance (Oguntona, 1982).

Today, resist fabric decoration has evolved from using the simple traditional indigo dyes and one colour dyeing techniques to variety of dyes and methods. Traditionally, hand woven fabrics were used, but varieties of factory manufacture products are on this increase used in its stead. This has increased the end usage of resist fabrics from day to daywear, to occasional wears and furnishing (e.g. ceremonies, festivals, bed sheets wall hangings, etc). Design creations and innovations are also on the increase that wears of resist products can standup favourably to the challenges of other patterned factory products. The techniques have been the source/means of economic empowerment to not only the people at the grass roots but also to the urban less privileged dwellers.

The resist studio practice therefore, has been a tool for vocational training of this less privileged people. This can be seen in the Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW) programme which was later taken over by Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP), set up in 1990-1996. These programmes were meant to discover, develop and encourage talents and creative energy of women right to the grass root level of the society. One of such talents emphasized is that of artistic skills involving those of art production in the form of small and medium scale craft activities, like textile design amongst which is resist techniques. Through these, a substantial number of the Nigerian less privileged will be self-employed, thus, encouraging self-reliance.

Recommendations

Federal government should revive, increase and encourage programmes that are studio based in this country. These programmes like Better Life for Rural Women Family Advancement were for the empowerment of the Nigerian society. They should therefore, continue. Assistance should be given to identify private organizations and individuals in the form of loan to boost their productivity and moral. Institutions, where such courses are taught should be funded.

Conclusion

Resist fabric decoration, though an age long craft has continued to evolve, improve and broaden its original scope and status in all ramifications. In addressing the issue of unemployment and self-reliance, it is a vocation, which can be looked into and embarked upon. It can be practiced at both small and medium scale as well as in rural and urban areas.

References

- Ada, P. O. (2005). A survey on the transition and continuity of textile art in the socio-cultural and economic development in African environment. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Volume 3(2).
- Adetoro, S. A. (1972). Resist method as an aspect of cloth decoration. A paper presented at the Art Seminar/Workshop, March 23-26. department of Fine Art.
- Adetoro, S. A. (1995). Some aspects of African fabric design - Nigerian experience. *Out of Africa*, 2nd Annual Lecture Series Organized by the African Studies Committee, CCSU.
- Richer, J. B. (1976). *Nigerian handcraft textiles*. University of Ife Press, Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Eregba, E. E. (2006). Improving the quality of governance in Nigeria: The role of education. *Journal of Qualitative Education* 2(1) Association for Encouraging Qualitative Education in Nigeria (ASSEQEN), pp. 78-83.
- Gwarry, W. B. (2004). An investigation into factors that cause inconsistency in design reproduction: An experimental study on resist dyeing techniques. Departmental Seminar Series, Department of Industrial Design, A. B. U., Zaria.

- Gwarry, W. B. (2005). Women's role in the development of Nigerian textile industry: Problems and possible solutions. *Journal of Environmental Studies (ENVIRON)* 2(3), A. B. U., Zaria.
- Meilach, D. E. (1973). *Contemporary batik and tie-dye*. New York: Crown Publishers Inc.
- Nkeonye, P. O. (1993), *Introductory textiles for home economists, students of arts and beginners generally*. S. Asekome & Co. Publishers Samaru-Zaria, Nigeria.
- Nkom, R. A. (2006). Capacity building through art education in nursery and primary schools. A paper presented at the International Conference on Humanities and Development in Africa. 28th - 29th June, University of Calabar, Cross River State. Nigeria.
- Oguntona, T. (1982). Quality control: Toward improving the made in Nigerian textiles. A paper presented at the conference of the Textile Institute, Nigerian Section, Thursday 29th and Friday 30th April, Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna, p. 6.
- Oguntona, T. (1986). *Basic textiles: Design concepts and methods*. Institute of Education, A. B. U., Zaria.
- Proud, N. (1974). *Textile dyeing and printing simplified*. New York: Aero Publishing Company Inc.
- Robinson, S. (1969). *A history of dyed textiles*. London: Studio Vista.